

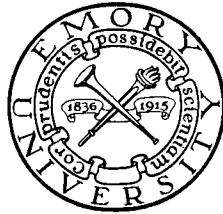


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WOMAN'S DEVOTION.

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WARD, LOCK, AND CO., LONDON, AND NEW YORK.

# THE QUEEN OF THE COUNTY.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF

'MARGARET AND HER BRIDESMAIDS,' "LADIES OF LOVEL LEIGH,"  
"A BOOK OF HEROINES," "THREE WIVES," ETC., ETC.

"The sea of Fortune doth not ever flow—  
She draws her favours to the lowest ebb,  
Her tides have equal times to come and go—  
Her loom doth weave the fine and coarsest web.  
No joy so great but runneth to an end;  
No hap so hard but may in fine amend.  
Unmingled joys here to no man befall;  
Who least, hath some; who most, hath never all."

ROBERT SOUTHWELL.

NEW EDITION.

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# THE QUEEN OF THE COUNTY.

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## CHAPTER I.

### EARLIEST RECOLLECTIONS.

**I**N my father's nursery were born twelve little girls. Two went early home. The other ten grew up, and fulfilled their several duties, we will hope, to the best of their ability. Alas! judging by myself, the second living, the fourth in order of birth, I look to that nursery, and mourn that through my long life I have done so little. Is this the natural feeling of age that it should be full of regrets?—regrets for lost opportunities?—for moments wasted?—for gifts neglected?—for warnings unheeded? 'Tis well that we have an old age to gather up the remembrance of all the undone things of our lives, that we may repent ere we die; 'tis well to soften the asperity of waning life by recalling the follies of our own youth.

Our nursery formed a part of an old-fashioned rectory, down in the north of England.

The day nursery looked into the world; it was a square room, with two windows on one side, two high chests of drawers on another, in which we had each an individual right to a large and a small drawer; a long table on the third side, and a wide, old-fashioned, Dutch-tiled fire-place on the fourth. The bars of the grate came out in a curve, bright as silver, and two substantial hobs gave a dignity and breadth to the fire-place. It was one of our childish delights to see the nursery-maid do up the fire. First the ashes were all raked out of the bottom bar, then all the bars were swept, and the nobs—"them nobs" (as Bell called them)—of coals, shining black nobs—were piled on in a most artistic manner, and sputtered out at once into little merry blazes. Then Bell swept out the hearth, with a vigour and a routing that left not an atom of dust or ashes in the remotest corner. Why Bell never burnt her red arms, or why they never frizzed, as we had seen legs of mutton fizzle in the kitchen, was always a wonder to us. She was reckless in her manner of doing up that fire, for if a red-hot cinder dared to fall after she had swept up the hearth, she coolly took it up in her fingers and tossed it back. The toss seemed occasioned more because it had fallen at an unpropitious moment, than because it was hot. We concluded, as soon as we were old enough to read of them, that Bell

was born a Salamander ; though what a Salamander really meant, we were at a loss to determine. But to return to the fire. After Bell had sifted out the largest ashes, and banked them up behind the "nobs," where they soon sent out a ruddy glow, she proceeded to perform what we considered the most interesting part of the whole ceremony. She went to the cupboard, and brought out an old pipkin, generally much chipped and ill-used ; within this was some lumpish grey stuff, half liquid, half solid, with a disreputable bit of old carpet, old mat, old flannel, remnants of our old cloaks, in fact anything that no one else would touch—Bell proceeded to saturate the hearth, to dab those places vacated by a Dutch tile, to flop the two nobs, and apparently make a most hideous mess of the whole thing. Then came our pleasure—we were crowded round to see. First appeared in the sea of slush a little snow-white island, then another—these joined—a dozen more—suddenly, as if by magic, the hearth, the nobs, the Dutch tile vacuums shone out white as sugar, pure as snow. While this metamorphosis ensued, Bell, with another piece of objectionable cloth, had wrenched the fire-irons, each in its turn, round and round ; then, as if they were desperately wicked, she flung them into their usual corners, with a violence that seemed to declare she would have nothing more to do with them. Finally she threw herself on to the high nursery fender, and polishing the brass rim, with apparently her whole body, she thrust it into its place, with a vehemence that seemed to say, "Stir, if ye dar." So restricting as regarded us, the great nursery fender was helpless in the hands of Bell.

On one side of the fireplace hung an instrument of dire import to us—namely, the "taws." The taws consisted of a long piece of leather, cut into six smaller strips. Some of us were more intimately acquainted with the taws than we liked ; they were very handy for nurse's use, and nurse's temper was equally ready to avail herself of them. We regarded this side of the fireplace with dislike, but the other with awe ; for there was a closet or recess on that side, wherein was a blocked-up window—light was taxed in those days—also a great cupboard, in which was kept all the nursery crockery and stores, with a place at the bottom for coals and sticks.

In the daytime we had no fear of this recess. But at night, at the precise time when we were all dressed, ready for a summons to go down to dessert—when Bell scurried off to what she called "right herself," and nurse went down to the pantry ostensibly to find out when dinner was over ; generally being in such good time, dinner could only be going in—when I was left in charge of the whole nursery, and the smallest baby asleep in its cradle, in particular,—then we began to have an awe of the left side of the fireplace. By the ruddy firelight, being allowed no candle, we sat and watched the recess, all as nearly huddled together as was consistent with the fear of tumbling our frocks. For at this time—out of a little mysterious hole that we could see, from underneath the coal and stick closet, from behind

the closed up window—little bright-eyed nimble mice took entire possession of the recess, and enacted all sorts of gambols and vagaries, in a very ghostly and inconceivable manner.

With fascinated eyes we watched them ; if one ventured so far as to touch the edge of the carpet, a universal dismay was silently exchanged, through the eyes, among us. But if they came beyond—if, with a daring that made our hearts quake, they ventured in a body a full yard across the carpet, then we rose with a simultaneous flutter, and all that could, fled to the safe refuge of chairs and tables. I alone dared not leave the cradle. I must remain to save baby, as I could not lift the cradle out of danger, and to take her up out of it would have brought the other side of the fireplace into speedy competition with the mice side. In other words, I should have felt the taws. And I only made up my mind which I disliked most, the right or the left side of the fireplace, as I felt the effect of the taws or the fears of the mice. We never learnt, by the sudden vanishing of the enemy upon our moving, that they might be as frightened of us as we of them. On the contrary, we regarded this inexplicable disappearance as the most alarming thing of all. • Where were they gone ? We did not see them go. Could they make themselves invisible ? Were they in the cradle, concealed in our clothes ? Anything and everything, but that they had scrambled back to their respective homes. When I left the nursery, ten years old, this awful matter was still a mystery.

Our nursery had two large windows, and because they looked out into the road, they had been modernised. The casements had been taken away, sashes put with strong bars across, for the presumed safety of the children. As far as my safety was concerned, I can solemnly affirm, these bars never prevented my putting my head out as far as I liked, to the imminent peril of dislocating my neck, or leaving an ear behind. On one occasion three of us were in such danger, all jammed together, it was almost thought at one time nurse must send for the blacksmith to extricate us. Nothing but the occasion being an extraordinary one, saved us all from a severe application of the taws for thus alarming her. The occasion was this. Our father and mother were very hospitable people. At certain seasons of the year they had certain parties or clubs to dine with them. Sometimes it was the Mayor and Corporation. Then there was the Literary Society dinner, and again the twenty-four Elders' dinner. At each and all of which we appeared at dessert, highly charmed ; and if not able to appreciate the pride with which our mother showed us off, we were not without a very sensible impression as to the delights of almonds and raisins, candied peel, preserved ginger, with famous figs (such as one never sees now), all of which we only saw and tasted on these great occasions.

A dinner to the Mayor and Corporation was impending. We knew of this fact because papa called us all down to the hall, to see a live turtle that had been sent to him, as a present for the occasion ; the



giver had also promised to send his cook to dress it. To our infantine minds the notion of eating anything alive was so hideous—was simply disgusting. We felt a great deal for the people who had to eat it, and could not reconcile to our minds that our kind father and mother should propose to feed them on such a beast. But they surveyed it themselves with so much complacency, and spoke of those invited as persons who would so felicitate themselves when they heard of the treat in store, that we shifted our pity from them, on the shoulders of the cook. What that cook would have to endure before he (we heard him mentioned as a he) transformed that horrible thing into a piece of nice roasted beef—our Sunday dinner, as well as principal idea of what was good, with Yorkshire pudding and browned potatoes—occupied our minds night and day.

We were constantly on the watch for his arrival. The nursery windows commanded the ingress and egress of both front and back doors, as well as a telescopic view of the principal street to the house, over one corner of the churchyard.

We had a sort of vague idea of letting him know we sympathised with him. If he came at a propitious moment, perhaps we might drop him a bit of our plum-bread lunch, served at eleven o'clock.

But when least prepared for it, Bell cries out,

"Ech me! but if there isn't the Mayor's coach coming up Pipelgate wi' someat awfu' inside!"

Up we all jumped, opened the windows, crammed our heads out, three of us through the bars. It was the Mayor's coach; we caught glimpses of the "awfu'" thing inside; they drove up to the front door, a parley ensued, the word "cook" was mentioned. Nothing got out, the door was shut, the coach whirled round, and in wheeling we caught a full and perfect view of a creature inside, totally black in the face, with a white linen cap. The coach drew up at the back door, we stretched out to look farther, the door opened, and out got a black creature, grinning, and bowing, and gesticulating, and, to our dismay, the back door opened, the coach door shut, the coach drove away empty, and the black man entered our walls, and was now within the house! No wonder we had all got fast in the bars, and in our struggles to release ourselves, partially forgot our fright at the black cook in our fright at being nearly choked.

If I remember right, the Mayor and Corporation, as well as our father and mother, all made excellent dinners, and enjoyed themselves very much. I know we had each a tiny sip of lime punch, which was so good we would have tasted it again, even had we been told that it was soup concocted from the beast by the black cook.

The churchyard was a very large one, and the great town church stood at the extreme end. Our father used to take us up in his arms and say,

"See, my children, what a view God has given you. You can see beyond the grave. Let my children think and picture to them-

selves, whenever they look at the churchyard, what like is the world beyond."

As for me, I saw my own tombstone there. Every time I went to church, I passed a little gravestone with my name on, and my rank in the family, as second daughter to my father. I held that place now, and she who had it before me was gone away to the other world of which we had to think. It was a world of spirits or angels, as we knew—the world which it was our desire, and must be our endeavour to reach. There was but one road to it, which was narrow and straight. My little sister had found it, and gone there.

Was it because she had some virtue in her that I did not possess? One little sister had merely opened her eyes on this world, and closed them again; but she whose place I occupied had lived some time.

I always spoke to her, in my heart, as often as I passed. I asked her if she was pleased with me; if I was doing what she wished. I was desirous to please her, and felt an inward happiness that somehow I was mysteriously linked to an angel in another world.

On Sunday evenings the church was lighted up with dim candles, making its vastness more vast (gas was not much used then, if invented), the organ pealed more solemnly, our father's voice had a distant warning sound in it. I liked to look up and fancy I saw angels listening up in the great roof, and one soft pair of eyes that beamed in sisterly love more particularly at me. I don't know that I was a good child. I think I was naughty when tempted to be so; but I never lost the impression that I was answerable to an angel in heaven for performing her part in the world. The little tombstone was like a conscience to me!

Our night nursery was a large one, with beams across it. It opened into a smaller one, called *par excellence* the young lady's room. Both rooms had casemented windows, at which the sprays of ivy tapped in the night, in a friendly and confidential manner while flocks of sparrows rushed out in the early morning with sharp bustling wings and noisy, quarrelsome twitterings, as if their whole household were overwhelmed with a sudden and unforeseen domestic misfortune. The last time I saw that room it was piled up to the beams with the dust, rubbish, and gatherings of the garret of a railway station. Plenty of noise, of whistling, screams, and puffings from never-quiet engines—but no sparrows, no ivy, not a twig left!

Nurse was great at soap and water. She thought everything in life should begin and end in soap and water. She scrubbed us as if we had been floors. As we each emerged out of her sinewy hard hands, we rejoiced that the most painful part of the day was over, and five of us prepared to go and read the Psalms of the day to papa while he shaved. This was a pleasant duty. Papa, whether in his dressing-gown, his face enveloped in soap-suds, or dressed waiting for us, was always pleased at our appearance. We never seemed to come amiss,

but were sure to be greeted with some little quaint joke, that made us forget the soap-suds in our eyes and nurse's hard hand.

Moreover there was a little money transaction enacted at this time, upon which part of the happiness of the day depended. One of us always received, after we had read the Psalms, the sum of a halfpenny, sometimes a penny; we have even experienced the delight of a whole twopence, in the substantial shape of four bulky halfpennies.

It was supposed that papa gave this vast sum as a reward to the best reader.

But imperceptibly it dawned upon us that the best reader did not so often get it. We have made happy dashes at long words, glibly run over a familiar verse, and made successful, though amazing guesses at proper names—all without a reward.

A reverent manner, a perception of the sense at the risk of orthography, an absorbed attention, very often got a penny, notwithstanding faulty pronunciation. Some little eyes watched papa's razor nervously nearing his nose, and thus lost their places.

Others, thinking their turn a long way off, ventured to count his shoes (papa never had a pair of boots in his life), and if the number of gaiters hanging on pegs above matched the number of shoes; they were always discovered counting.

Again, there was a round mirror that had the effect of making us the broadest-faced, oddest-looking children ever seen. The temptation to see if we had grown any thinner in the estimation of this mirror was great, even to the oldest ones.

On birthdays, which papa was so wonderfully clever as never to forget, his wardrobe was opened, and off the uppermost shelf he took from peaceful repose a very fierce sword. That it was of a savage nature we knew, because, besides its own scabbard, it was encased in a bag of wash leather, which again was guarded by one of green baize. When drawn forth, it was very bright and dazzling, and so delightful was the interesting ceremony of seeing it taken out of its bags, we should have been glad had there been several more. It was so sharp and bright, we thought, had it a mind to do so, it could easily cut through its own scabbard and the two bags. Therefore, for safety, more would have been desirable, let alone the additional pleasure to us of lengthening the interesting ceremony of unbagging it.

It belonged originally to our grandfather, and had been worn by him when he volunteered at the Bristol riots, many years ago. As papa bagged it up again, he always pronounced, in a solemn tone, placing it back in honourable repose—

“Perhaps this sword has killed a man.”

Prepared as we were for this announcement, constant repetition never weakened its effect.

We felt sure it was a good sword—a sword made to kill wicked people. Of course so good a sword had done its duty.

After leaving papa, we went to breakfast.

On our long table against the wall were seven little mugs of rather blue milk, and seven large lumps of bread. I am trying to remember if we ever had butter on those lumps of bread. I think not. Nurse was very fond of buttered toast. Her table was round, and near the fire. One baby sat on her knee, and she who had been baby sat on a high chair at her side. Bell took her breakfast in the recess, after nurse had finished, under difficult circumstances too, as there was neither chair nor table, only the shelf of the closet.

Baby on nurse's knee was at that age when a laudable anxiety to know the meaning of everything developes itself. Through the medium of her fingers, she was making all sorts of discoveries. Now they were pattering over nurse's buttered toast; in a minute, they were in the sugar basin; then they wandered to a glittering knife, grasping with baby bravery the sharp blade; finally, they popped themselves into nurse's cup of hot tea, and of course upset it.

Old baby, who seems to us to have been the first baby that ever was born, hears baby proper's scream of dismay with a certain satisfaction. She explains, in language that to us borders upon the unknown tongue, that this sad catastrophe was no more than what might have been expected from the awful behaviour of baby ever since she got up. Though desirous to teach her how to behave, and having at great trouble to herself set her a very good example, baby has gone on all the morning in a heedless and defiant manner. Now, even while nurse is wiping up the great slop she has made, and she is listening with much sagacity to old baby's lecture, she laughs a little laugh of defiance, and thrusts her still tingling fingers into nurse's butter. Nurse is easily angered through her butter, so baby is scolded, slightly shaken, and popped upon the floor. She sulks for a minute, but catching sight of old baby's warning face peeping round, she petulantly turns away, and sighting the coal-scuttle, takes advantage of nurse's devotion to tea and buttered toast, and with marvellous rapidity wriggles herself to it. In a few minutes she has made herself the dirtiest little baby ever seen.

"Ay! but yer aggravating!" exclaims nurse, and carries her off to be washed and dressed again.

---

## CHAPTER II.

### PLAYS AND PASTIMES.



THE rectory had a large garden attached to it, appended to one side of the house, like a wind-blown flag. There was a long walk from end to end—up and down it eleven times made a mile. At the lower end the garden took a sudden turn upwards. Near the house it took a similar turn downwards. In this

latter part lived thirteen apple-trees. I don't remember that they ever did any duty, and bore apples ; but perhaps that was not their fault—for we were surrounded by smoke of all kinds. Amongst these apple-trees there was a venerable pump. We delighted to pump very hard for a minute or two ; then rushing down to the wall that bounded the garden, we peeped over, and waited with nervous delight for the water which we had pumped to come with a sudden noisy rush through a hole in the wall. We have done this every day for months, and it does not seem to me we ever tired of it.

Our grandmother had given us a carriage suited to the exigencies of so many children. It was of circular form ; five, even six, could get inside ; two pulled, which by some hallucination peculiar to our brains, was supposed to be the most honourable situation of all. Three pushed behind, which was a duty also much coveted.

No flowers grew in the garden, for the same reason that the apple-trees would not bear apples ; but we had a beech hedge in one part of it, whose tender green leaves afforded us as much delight as if they had been flowers, until they became smoke-dried. We were also greatly interested in the strange chrysalis things that hung in every variety from venerable old currant-trees nailed against the wall, and which never had anything else hanging on them.

Our garden had two arbours—one a dark den, much frequented by spiders and earwigs ; the other, on the highest, most open, and sunniest part of the garden, wide, large, enriched by a green bench, ornamented by a wild clematis, and inhabited by Adam and Eve. This statue of apparently very youthful art presented Adam on one side, with a blooming complexion, a hooked nose, a long open gown, displaying the costume of a blue-coat boy of the present day ; Eve on the other, attached so indissolubly to Adam, that they were indeed one, and united from head to heel, had not so decided a complexion, and had lost her nose before our day. But she had an elaborate head-dress, the remains of gilt ear-rings, an attempt at a ruff and flowered gown, clocked stockings, and high-heeled shoes.

It was our pastime to divide, and take to imaginary living in either arbour. By common consent, being the oldest and strongest (our eldest sister did not live with us), I was always obliged to take Earwig Cottage as my tenement ; for there was a mysterious door close by, with a great lock in it, and two bolts, which we knew led into an evil and dark lane ; indeed, whenever we had someone on whom we could depend as regarded strength and courage, we were morbidly desirous always to have this door opened, that we might peep out. We feared the door when alone, as much as if a wild beast lived on the other side, waiting to devour us.

Those who lived with me in Earwig Cottage always did so by lot, and not by choice. Independently of the dreadful door, the earwigs and spiders were great hindrances to our comfort, and moreover we had to acknowledge ourselves as inferior beings to those who lived in



Sunshine Palace. They called themselves lords and ladies, at times queens and kings, with a lot of princes and princesses ; while we never ranked higher than respectable farmers, and even went so low as to be gipsies—camping out.

Our furniture consisted of bits of old brick, broken shreds of garden-pots, some valuable oyster shells, and part of an old wheel-barrow for a table ; while they had two crab shells, a painted mug, a set of old doll's tea-things, and a regular table, besides the constant company of Adam and Eve.

In fact, when visitors came to call, Adam and Eve did the principal part of the entertaining. Should you chance to come when Eve was showing her once beautiful face to the company, you were formally introduced to her, and requested to admire her dress, her hair, even her shoes ; and after every beauty had been pointed out, and you were not likely ever to forget Mrs. Eve, at some moment, when you looked away, she was adroitly turned round, and you were then called upon to be introduced to Mr. Adam, and go through all his perfections.

Though we Earwigs seldom ventured up to Sunshine Palace without leave, or unless in the orthodox figure of beggars, the inhabitants of that favoured abode were very condescending in their visits to us. Sometimes they came in their coach, namely, the circular carriage, and we were honoured by being ordered to drag them up the hill again. They made us magnificent, but imaginary, presents of food, clothing, furniture, and money. They ordered invisible carpenters to mend our house, imperceptible masons to build us a new one, and were the more profuse in their offers, and louder in their commands, the more improbable the fulfilment.

But it made us all very happy, and I think to this day was not without its use ; we exercised our wits in imaginary conversations, we exerted our faculties in devising makeshifts, we taught each other the habits and modes of polite life, and we were not without the ambition of practising the higher virtues of patience, forbearance, and generosity. It is true all was done in play, but the love of acting rightly, grew with our play.

Adam and Eve joined in it all. I think now in my old age I would give much to see their well-remembered forms again, and would even kiss their stony faces, as we used to do so long ago, when we childishly bid them good night.

In the long winter evenings, when we could not do more in the daytime than run up and down in the garden, papa used to play with us in the hall ; blindman's buff, prisoners base, and French and English, made the house sound again. A rare romp was papa ! We had need to run, to be wary, to creep under chairs, to make bold dashes—he was everywhere in a minute, and yet so discreet we never met with any accident.

If any company were staying in the house, papa took a dish of apples or oranges, and cutting the whole dish up, fed us all like a nest

of birdlings, taking his turn with us, which was highly gratifying, and then sending us to play quietly by ourselves.

This was a favourite game. We divided into two parties—one at one end of the room, the other opposite. One side began :

“How many miles to Coventry?”

The answer from the opposite party :

“Three score miles and ten.”

“Can we get there by candle-light.”

“Yes, and back again.”

Upon which both parties set out as hard as they could run, and exchanged places.

Then they began again, the other party asking, and the first party answering.

This game sent us breathless and rosy to bed ; and, though apparently monotonous, never seemed to weary us.

Thus our childhood glided on. If our pleasures were more simple, our duties less arduous, our minds less cultivated than is now the case with the children I see around me, at least we learnt many things that held their sway over us through life's journey.

An early reverence for God and His commands, shadowed forth in the mixture of fear and love with which our earthly father ruled us.

When I and my younger sister, Marblette, were selected to say our catechism in church, before the whole world, with the town children, her little sensitive nature shrunk from the ordeal.

“My two little girls,” said papa, gravely, “will not only say their catechism in church on Easter Sunday, but will repeat it without fault, so that all the world may see I exact no more from other children than what my own can do.”

And we said it as he wished, without fault.

In our play-time, with our two arbours, we early learnt that there are, and must be, situations in the world disagreeable, but still unavoidable, and that nothing more can be done than to make the best of them. There was one law never infringed in our nursery—the eldest gave place to the youngest.

There was another rule, born we know not how among us—that, after a quarrel, the offended one besought pardon of the offender.

Amongst us there were passionate ones, heedless ones, peevish ones, sulky ones, but we were so hedged about with the confiding love of our father and mother that there was no loophole for large sins to creep in.

We hated the taws, and feared the mice ; but out of this hatred grew the desire to be good, and from this fear arose the necessity to brave it.

Politics in those days ruled every household. Our mother was a red-hot Tory. Thus we often heard discussions regarding the Government of our country, and various public characters were judged with a freedom and severity that startled even our innocent minds.

Our mother was one of those feminine creatures who seem on the surface wholly made up of yielding and beneficent virtues. She was the fondest wife possible, the tenderest mother. She was very beautiful in person, and her mind was singularly acute and intelligent. In addition to these desirable qualities, she was utterly unselfish. It was rare to see a woman so pretty, so vivacious, so entertaining, so amiable, and yet so utterly unconscious of her gifts. This of course added to her charms, and papa would have been an unworthy descendant of our forefather Adam, had he not succumbed to her entirely, though I believe they were both as ignorant of such a state of things as their youngest baby.

It was impossible to be dull in her company. She was fond of theories of all kinds. No matter whether they were for the good of the country, or to have no further scope than her own household, she pursued them with that enthusiasm that is seldom bestowed upon facts. We were now and then made aware of this little feature in her character by some theory carried out in the nursery. But she was rabid on politics. Almost all the enthusiasm she possessed was thrown without reserve into her political feelings.

"My dear," would our father say, mildly, after she had credited the Whigs with a few crimes, bred solely in her own vivacious mind, "surely you mistake. I did not read to-day that the Whigs intended to dethrone the king, do away with the lords, and establish a democracy."

"No, you did not read it, but they are going to do it."

"They have told you so, perhaps?"

"My dear husband, no! But cannot you see what they are driving at? Church and state—all will go. They mean to upset everything."

"Then, little girls," says papa to us, "come and eat up this dish of apples, before the wicked Whigs come to take it away."

"Papa," I whispered over my last bit of apple, "why do people care for politics?"

"You were reading a definition of the word 'ethics' this morning—I told you it was to teach you to be a good Christian. The study of politics will make you a good neighbour and citizen."

"Cannot God make good politics?" asked Marblette, who was evidently much disturbed at mamma's fears for the future welfare of England.

"Good politicians! Well, Marblette, God can do everything. He not only gives us more than we desire or deserve, but what we ask for in our wildest wishes is not worth what He gives without. If He thinks fit, England will not be without good politicians to govern her."

After some of these conversations, it was not unusual for me to take a favourable opportunity of haranguing the nursery on the subject of politics. But to the infinite horror of my audience, I advocated Whig

principles. It was not until after repeated trials that I obtained a hearing in the excited nursery on this announcement. But being very arbitrary, I banged one, scolded another, put a third into a little sort of prison-house, between the two chests of drawers, and blocked her up with nurse's round table.

Compelling silence, or in fact obtaining a hearing through the knowledge that I would have my own way, I explained that my motives for taking up Whig principles arose entirely from charity. There was no one down-stairs to speak a good word for them. Everybody, that ever we heard, abused them, excepting papa, and he seemed, without advocating their cause, at least to allow they were patriotic. Patriot was a very fine word—it was only applied to magnanimous people; *ergo*, there must be some good in Whigs if they were patriots. Moreover, I appealed to their natural kindness of heart. They only heard the Tory side downstairs. To be perfectly fair and just, they ought to hear both sides. I would make it my business to read the newspapers, and let them know from time to time whether the Whigs were getting better or worse. There appeared to be a great number of them in the world. We should not like to hate such a number of people.

### CHAPTER III.

#### A WALK IN CHILDHOOD.



I CAN remember that once we had a governess. Whether our number alarmed her, or that the race of governesses was not so numerous then as now, she soon left us, and we went to a daily school.

At eight o'clock in the morning we breakfasted. While we did so, seven little cloaks of grey duffle were put upon the backs of our chairs by Bell; seven little black bonnets, with rosettes of black satin ribbon to ornament them, seven pair of mittens, seven pair of thick shoes, were laid upon the window-seats.

Bell then went into the recess and ate her breakfast in the uncomfortable manner before described. Suddenly she would rush out, rattle up all our mugs and plates, fling them recklessly into the cupboard, make a sort of pretence of tidying the room (nurse usually took the babies at this time to see mamma), and bid the elder girls dress the younger. When she saw that we were ready, the clock on the stroke of half-past eight, she would rush into her own room, rush back again with bonnet and shawl in hand, and proceed to upbraid us for being late.

We emerged from the nursery into a large landing-place with doors on all sides—the three nursery doors, the two doors of the servants' rooms, a curious door leading up to vast garrets; and this door we

heartily wished was nailed up, though we sometimes ventured upstairs in broad day-light—nurse parading up and down the passage giving baby what she called the air. There were twenty-two steps, in all, up to those garrets. Once I ventured all the way, and peeped round; but I don't know that any other amongst us achieved this feat.

There was another door, covered with red baize, and handsomely decorated with brass nails. This was a swing door, and divided the old part of the house from the new. We had outgrown the rectory, and papa had added almost a whole house to the old one.

The nursery staircase was a curious one, going down through the wall, and ending in a long passage, crossed by another, which took us out into the garden. From thence by a front door which to the uninitiated appeared impenetrably closed; but a little friendly knob permitting us with some labour to screw it round, open flew the great door, and we were let into the street.

The very first house presented at once an attraction rarely resisted. It was Thomson's, the toffee shop, or, as north-country folks call it, "claggum;" and never was substance more appropriately named. Here the possessor of papa's good money spent half of it, and with impartial justice divided whatever the portion might be into eight parts. One for each of the seven, and one for Bell. Not always impartially, however, for if by some accident, owing to the peculiar nature of "claggum," it would not permit itself to be divided fairly, the owner of the sweet morsel always took the smallest piece. Thomson's was a corner shop, and we immediately turned down into a narrow little street, with the wall of the churchyard on one side, and mean little smoky houses on the other. But the street had an interest in our eyes greater even than Thomson's shop. Ducrow was born in one of these mean little houses. We were apt to boast at our school that we lived close to Ducrow.

Another interest in the street was that Bell's mother lived in the oldest and dirtiest of all the houses. Once or twice, when rich in pennies, we had gravely discussed the propriety of making Bell's mother go into one of the best houses, the rent of which we proposed to pay.

Invariably as we reached her objectionable abode, Bell said—

"Miss Dudu, I heard mither was but poorly last night; step on a bit, while I run and ax her how she do, but for your life dinna gang out o' sicht."

But a few steps took us out of the narrow street into a broad steep pitched road, on one side of which the churchyard wall rose sixteen feet high, while on the opposite side were great stone buildings, warehouses, what was called the county chamber, and an iron-faced bank.

Here, like a little flock of stray sheep, we were at once lost in the huge traffic that laboured and toiled up and down the steep pitch. To ease it as much as possible, the road-way was formed like an S.



Near the uppermost turn was the little dark, close gully, not ten feet wide, with houses on each side six stories high, down which the Duke of Cumberland refused to go. Red-hot as he might be to squash the Scottish rebellion, he had no desire to go down "a coal-pit," he said, to get to Newcastle, and so on to Scotland. He preferred a twenty-mile gallop up South Tyne, and crossed the river in a gentlemanly manner by Hexham Bridge. History saith he feared being shot from out of the close-packed windows. But this supposed coal-pit was in those days, and for many days after, the only road from Gateshead to Newcastle, and went abruptly down, as was the fashion then, straight on to the bridge. A watchman was kept to give notice when the way was clear, as two vehicles meeting would be unable to pass each other, and the warning-bell was heard tinkling every minute. This inconvenience was remedied by making the road-way on which we now found ourselves. Superior as it was to the other, being thirty yards across, yet so great was the incline that all the horses drawing heavy loads were shod in a peculiar manner. They had a species of clasp on the fore-part of each shoe, that gave them a hold on the pitching, while strong wedges or hooks, on the back part of the shoe, enabled them to resist the weight going down hill. Our mother never went up or down that hill in a carriage all the twenty-four years she lived so near it.

But we proceed with slow steps down the pavement, looking anxiously back for Bell, and hugging the great churchyard wall as part of our home. The people are kind, and say pleasant things to us, or of us.

"Ay! there gang the rector's likely bairns, bonny lasses all; I mind hearing he hae as mony mair at hame. Dinna be feared, hinnie, I'll joost keep 'twixt you and the street."

The only fear we had was when droves of cattle came by; then I and Marblette, also in charge, lost a great deal of our presence of mind, and with that our command over the juniors. We two instantly clutched a little one, while the intermediate ones fled as best they might.

But this did not often happen; and by the time we were at the bottom of the hill, and close verging upon the vortex of the bridge, Bell might be seen scurrying after us, like a naughty colly dog that had left his charge while he went on a little excursion of his own.

Bell knew we would not venture on the bridge by ourselves. First, there was an incessant traffic; secondly, the bridge was lined on either side by women selling every conceivable thing, and calling out their goods, and the prices of them, with shrill but not unmusical cries, so many together almost deafening one. As for a southerner knowing what they sold out of these great baskets, from what they said, the cries might have been in Greek.

"Foin Borgundy peers, harpenny piece—foin Borgundy peers." "Foin haddies, finny haddies, twa a penny, caller haddies." "Awpoools, awpoools, fouer a penny—foin reed awpoools." "Candies, sweeties, mints, and sookies, foin mints and sookies."

At the entrance of the bridge, in a little quiet corner, sat day by day a little white-faced girl, making cotton nightcaps with a crooked bone. Now-a-days, what she was doing is called *crochet*. No matter how small the sum for "*claggum*," half was always reserved for this little girl, and the fortunate owner of this vast sum clutched it carefully in her little hot hand, notwithstanding the peril of meeting even a drove of cattle. We did many things for the sole purpose of deserving the little mite we daily gave this child. And she was even the means of influencing our actions towards each other; for it was not an uncommon thing in our nursery for one to say to the other, "If you will be good and do this, you shall give my halfpenny to our nightcap girl," so high did we consider the privilege of benefiting her. We never spoke to her, or she to us, but her little colourless cheek had a blush on it the moment she saw us, and the languid eye sparkled with a warmth of love and gratitude that spoke to us much more than words. What was really the matter with her, we were too delicate to ask. We knew she never walked, and had never walked, and there was something strange rising up behind, under her little tippet. She had not a straight back as we had. Her little white face rose up out of the middle of her chest, it seemed to us, though we carefully avoided even a gaze of curiosity.

Threading our way over the bridge, under the arms of most of the crowd, Bell angrily jostling against any one, we stayed not to accept the kindly offers of "*awpoools*," or "*Borgundy peers*," or "*mints and sookies*" lavishly made us. Neither were we seduced to stop at the bulging balustrades occurring here and there in the bridge, through which we could see the wonderful river, flowing on with such resistless power, bearing on its surface ships of all sizes and shapes—round-bodied Dutchmen, low in the water; ugly black-looking whale-ships; brown business-looking Danes, with a fleet of coal-keels, some going with the tide, others heaving up against it, impelled by two keelsmen running from end to end with long poles, and singing, "*Weel may the keel row, the keel row, the keel row, weel may the keel row, that my lad's in*," a tune which inspirits a Newcastleman, as the "*Ranz des Vaches*" enraptures the exiled Swiss.

Most seducing was the river to us, but not to be indulged with only Bell for an escort. Young as we were, we knew the hopeless and helpless state to which she would be reduced if there was any lingering or hesitation on the part of her little flock. Besides, a crisis was impending in our walk. We were about to undergo its greatest trial. There was a narrow street on the Newcastle side of the bridge, as well as on the Gateshead one. But inasmuch as two carts could meet and pass, the absolute necessity for any improvement in the thoroughfare had

not presented itself. It remained as it was in the days of the Duke of Cumberland. We had to cross this street. Considering that we never approached it without seeing a string of vehicles, waggons, carts, carriages, the mayor's fine coach, the glass vans, the drags loaded with clanging iron bars, all waiting their turn to pass along, it may well be imagined that the perils of crossing it weighed upon our minds until the feat was accomplished.

Any hope of assistance from Bell was entirely out of the question. We generally accomplished the difficulty with a dash. Marblette, blue-eyed and rosy, sped over like a lapwing, guiding by the hand a dot of a sister called Charlotte, who was to the full as active and alert as herself. They were always over first. Two others, younger than Marblette, older than Charlotte, essayed the passage hand-in-hand. A fixed determination and great bravery were stamped upon their round faces, though their black eyes were distended with apprehension. How they threaded their way through all the carts and coaches, and never were driven over, is a marvel. They were never flurried or hurried. They had a deliberate plan for accomplishing the deed, and generally found themselves safe by Marblette and her charge, watching the adventures of myself and Bell, to whose skirts clung a little fair, fragile girl, whose rank in the family entitled her to the name of Nona. I always considered it impossible for me to cross until I had seen Bell and Nona safely over. The dashes Bell made half-way across, then the dashes back, might have thrown the little darling a dozen times under the feet of the horses, but for the resolute manner in which she clung to Bell's garments. As often as not some great begrimed fellow, with a coal-heaver's hat, and a ponderous brass-mounted whip, would lift the pretty little creature with a touch as delicate as a butterfly's, and, bearing her across with infinite care, place her by her sisters. No sooner was she safely landed, than, regardless of Bell, I lifted up the youngest of the seven (who did not go to school, but only accompanied us for the sake of the walk), and staggered over to join the others.

And now, the crossing accomplished, we might look about and enjoy ourselves.

Immediately opened to us the great wide space called Sandgate. Opposite was the open colonnaded fish-market, where all the women were assembled with great baskets of silvery, slippery herrings, and buyers were thronging, and voices shouting—the whole scene being as lively and diverting as a play. A little further on, before us, was the curious many-windowed house out of which one night stepped a pretty young lady into the arms of her lover, who made her Lady Eldon. Near this was a bookseller's shop, where papa bought us each the Bible bound in morocco leather, which we earned by saying our catechism with the school children in church. On Easter Sunday we had not missed a word of the portions that came to our turn. One of these was that most difficult of all things to remember correctly—"I

desire of my Lord God," &c. &c. Nevertheless Marblette repeated it in a matchless manner, her little sweet childish voice being heard like a silver bell all over the church. "And so reverently, too," said papa, "as if she understood the solemnity of the words."

So, to return to our walk, this bookseller's shop was an object of great interest to us. We were all nervously anxious that no handsomer Bibles should be seen in the windows than the two in our possession. Turning off Sandgate to go up the hill, steeper even than the one in Gateshead, and quite straight, we came upon a series of shops that entirely captivated us. Such mountains of almond comfits, such bars of red and yellow barley sugar, such heaps of goodies, such bulls' eyes, lozenges, peppermints, gingerbread, almond rock—every window was a whole fairyland of delicious things! Not even Robert of Normandy's beautiful castle rising straight in front of us, or the first sight of the great city wall, twenty feet high, and seven feet thick, built by a rich burgher of Newcastle to save himself and his fellow-townsmen from being carried off prisoners by the Picts—he having been once kidnapped, and saved from bondage only by paying a vast ransom;—nothing drew away our eyes from the shop windows as long as they were of this seducing nature. But up Dean Street we must now toil, arriving breathless in Moseley Street, where dwelt the delightfully polite and much-perfumed Mr. Collins, the hair-dresser. He always, when cutting our hair, apologised in the most charming manner for doing so, though it was an operation we much affected, and to which we would have submitted every day, and all day, had we been blessed, like Absalom, with an over-abundance of hair. He had a habit of saying to each of us, as we approached to be wrapped up in his cotton apparatus, "Dear me, Miss, 'ow you 'ave growed!" So great, indeed, was the habit, that long after I was married, being certainly at the time thirty years old, on going into his shop to indulge once more in the old delightful sensation of having my hair manipulated by him, and recalling myself to his recollection by my maiden name, he started back, just as he used to do in former years, and said, "Dear me, Miss, 'ow you 'ave growed!"

He wore his own hair curled and frizzled like the pictures of George IV., and was altogether in figure very like him. I strongly suspect he took a great deal of snuff, he spoke so very much through his nose.

Out of Moseley Street we passed into Pilgrim Street, and there, conscious that the rest of our walk would be straight and uneventful, we clustered together, and chattered out our childish thoughts—an amusement which lasted until we arrived at some great iron gates, within which was a large swimming bath. We always thought it our duty to pause and look in, for our eldest sister had once fallen in and been rescued by papa, who jumped in after her, not only with all his clothes on, but his spectacles too. These of course were lost, as well our sister's pretty muff, made of soft moleskin. It was our duty to mourn respectfully over these two drowned things, each time we went

by. Our sister did not live with us, but was being educated in the South, and was regarded with so much mingled awe and admiration—as to be quite an object of worship.

When asked how many we were, it was a rule with the little ones always to reply, "We are nine little girls, and one young lady."

Glose by the iron gates was another seducing shop, of a much higher stamp than those down in Sandgate, which were more for the sailors. Here were grand wedding cakes, all over little Cupids; young sugar Highlanders, with whom we fell in love; shepherds and shepherdesses, looking sweetness itself. There were bottles upon bottles of beautiful rosy wine, spongecakes of intricate and marvellous shapes, boxes of figs, plums, and blooming raisins—altogether a regal shop.

Just before we turned out of Pilgrim Street, we passed the door of a mansion where dwelt the largest lady we had ever seen. She had been wooed and wedded at the ripe age of forty, and we had been all invited to eat wedding cake. The bride sat in all her bridal bravery, and boasted to our mother (as she ate a wedge of her own cake, that would have spread dyspepsia in our nursery for a week) that it had taken thirty-eight yards of silk to make her wedding dress; which in those days of gores, and no crinolines, was certainly prodigious to hear of. How her husband admired her! He walked round her—it was quite a walk—chuckling with delight at the mountain of loveliness that was all his own!

"Eighteen stun," as he called it, "I give ye my word, mam—and hard as a board!"

They were a very happy couple. When they laughed, which they always did together, out of compliment to each other, they shook the house.

We saw many things in this walk of ours that were marvellous to us, but the fat lady struck us the most. As we turned the corner of her house we came into a wide, open street. On one side—alone in a quaint garden, clothed with a close-fitting garment of ivy—was a beautiful old tower, one of the seven built in the great wall that surrounded Newcastle, still so perfect that it was inhabited; and on winter nights, with bright lights shining in its old windows, we almost fancied its first inhabitants still lived there.

Just beyond it was a prosaic, dull, uninteresting line of houses, the first of which was our school; and in a few moments, forgetful of the wonders of our walk, we were deeply absorbed in all the troubles and turmoils of school life.

We had no feelings of envy for the little scholars placed in a warm corner by the great school fire.

The walk home from school was very different from the walk there. The streets were more quiet; if in summer, ladies were shopping, and carriages driving about. We were often met by friends of our father and mother, and at times taken into one of those delightful goody-shops,

and treated to whatever our fancy most delighted in. Bell, too, was more staid in her manner, and, with her best bonnet and shawl on, did her utmost not to disgrace them.

The crossing was absolutely forgotten until we came to it, and was so free of traffic, that we each crossed over by a line of our own, or might have walked seven abreast.

The hawkers on the bridge were gone home, the little pale girl had been lifted and carried away by her father, as Bell passed over the bridge to come for us.

The steep street did not seem steep to us. We sped up it, light in heart as in heels, until we reached home, when we flung ourselves on the mysteriously fastened front door; which would not open, so puzzled was it by the lots of little fingers, each trying who should be first to screw round the spring. At last relenting, it burst open of a sudden, precipitating us all into the court like sugar-plums rolled out of a bottle. We escaped falling down by a miracle, and rushing upstairs, we are up in the nursery the next second—all received with screams of delight by the two babies, and the little one who had walked with us in the morning. It depended on circumstances how nurse welcomed us, and we felt, like the pilgrims of old, safe after a perilous journey, happy—a day of duty done.

If in winter time the evening was wet, Bell was bid to take a hackney-coach. How delighted we were, but not so delighted as Bell. She sat in the middle of the coach grinning broadly, and was so overcome with ecstasy, she would be of no manner of use.


“Ech me, but this is gran’! Ech me, if I wor a born leddy, I’d be in a coach night and day. Ay, but I’ll be mad wi mither, if her isn’t lucking oot, and seeing me gang by, like a leddy!”

“Like a leddy!” The repetition of this phrase in our ears had its due effect. We greatly desired to be ladies, like our eldest sister. Still more did we desire to be good christians. “For,” said papa, “the best gift God has given us, is an abhorrence of sin, even while we commit it. This is conscience. This is the nature the lost angels forfeited; and it was given to us. My children, let us thank God for the gift—and be sure to use it well.”

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## CHAPTER IV.

### AN EPISODE.

URING three of the summer months we usually removed from our smoke-enveloped home to the cramped space of sea-side lodgings. The village was large, and contained good houses, but excepting the hall and the Rectory, there were none that would take in the whole of our family. Thus we were

divided, and the life we led had a romance in it that was charming. The house which contained nurse and the babies was also the house of general entertainment. Papa and mamma lived next-door, and had six children with them. Bell, trusted to take charge of Marblette and me, lived in what was called the Cross-house. The vigilant eye of nurse was ever ready to take severe note of the doings of the Cross-house; if Bell dared to venture out, or even so much as merely stand at the door, nurse's shrill voice came down the bank, right into her ears.

"Bell, my woman, let me just git hand of ye!"

We were never quite sure that Bell did not sometimes taste the taws, as well as ourselves.

Poor Bell! I have often thought since that nurse was thus strict for her good. We children knew well that Bell was a genius in falsehood, accomplished as a deceiver, and given to a dexterous self-appropriation of little things—in the shape of half-used reels of thread, battered thimbles, an odd end of ribbon, or a remnant of calico. And as for anything nice to eat, Bell's powers of resistance were—nothing!

Poor Bell! I wonder now if you would have been good under any circumstances.

We conceived it our duty, at times, to lecture her.

"Lawks! Miss Dudu, who expects a poor friendless lass to be guid?"

"You are not friendless, Bell—you have a mother, you have us, and an Almighty Father in heaven."

"And div ye think, young leddies, as ony-body i' the heavens would be after minding the loiks of me?"

"But He does, Bell, and you are very wicked to think otherwise."

"Oh! Miss, I'm no a striver. Mither says I'm feckless, and must just gang on as I can."

"Then your mother is very naughty—she ought to encourage you to do your best, or God will not love you."

"To hear that noo! I'll never believe it, Miss; and I can tell you, I dinna want to be believing on it."

"If you talk like that, Bell, we must tell papa."

"Dinna do that, my darlings; mither will pay me, I'se warrant, if I lose my good place; and think o' me wi' no nice dinner, naething but what I may scrape oop at ony back-door. Whiles I think maybe I'll be a striver, but ye ken, little leddies, nurse is fashious, and I had no time to think o' ony thing but her whimsies."

This being true, we allowed it, and Bell took advantage of the admission to talk us down ever after. Poor Bell! She had but one opportunity to rush to destruction, and she took it.

The only time when she was really withdrawn from nurse's eyes, happened when she took us elder ones for a longer walk than nurse and the babies could venture.

We knew what was impending when Bell rushed in, and, contrary to her wont, helped us on with our walking things.

"We're to gang to Byer's Bay, young leddies, and we're to hae a good spell, and need-na be hame until tea-time."

Byer's Bay was a small, but most beautiful, little nook in the rock-bound coast, where the pilot boats lay at times, watching for vessels making for the mouths of the Wear and Tyne rivers. The whole coast was dangerous, but this bay, not two hundred yards across, held deep water in it at high tide, with a long shelving platform of limestone rock running out to sea, that formed a sort of natural pier. On the opposite side rose a single detached rock, fifty feet high, which ages and centuries had so shapen that it was now a beautiful and picturesque arch. When the waves ran, white crested from end to end, they parted at the head of the arch, then met again between—bubbling, boiling, and buffeting, until the cliffs were covered with light tufts of foam, that the winds gathered up and played with, as they creamed up underneath the archway. Then the waves, joining again, sped up the shingly bosom of the bay, with a force and power that made a noise like thunder in hollow caverns.

The archway served as a guide and breakwater, and the pilots, finding the little bay, though turbulent, yet a safe shelter, built two cottages in the hollow of a bank, and had settled their wives and families in them.

We loved to go to Byer's Bay. If the tide was out, down in that deep sea-way we found innumerable curious things, not the least of which was a spring of fresh water, that was uncovered by the sea but one hour out of every twenty-four.

If we caught the fortunate half-hour of the tide, when it was permitted to bubble up, free and sweet, how we lay down, regardless of wet sea-weeds and hidden pools, drinking it in, as if it possessed some secret charm.

What haunts of great crabs lay about the base of that grand old storm-beaten arch, which, now exposed to its very base, seemed riveted and chained together by monstrous coils of sea-weeds. Farther out, in deep, never-emptied pools, we paddled with bare feet, capturing the rose-coloured coddings (that were so disappointingly grey when cooked), carefully avoiding the great polypi that spread out their long red horrid hundreds of fingers, as if to clasp us somehow. Clustering under the archway, we shouted in childish triumph that we could stand where the sea rolled twenty feet deep twice a day. When the tide was in, we sat sheltered under a hanging cliff, and watching the rising, rolling, resistless wave coming with slow, steady, inexorable purpose, breaking against the archway, sending its spray up to the very top of the arch, and uniting again, roll up with a mighty clattering of shingle to our very feet. While we were thus employed, poor unfortunate Bell used to cultivate the acquaintance of the people in the cottages



We knew they were an indifferent set. They looked wild, and had rough, rude manners. The children were mischievous and wicked ; the women a very handsome race, with their dark skins, and beautiful bloom, large grey eyes—were bold, or what nurse styled “brazen-faced.”

Bell’s love of gossip led her to take great delight in these people. Always a little in disgrace with nurse, conscious that she deserved to be so, and with no desire to “fash herself” to do better, it was a comfort to converse with people below herself.

She surprised them with her tales of life at the Rectory—amongst “the quality,” as she called it ; and they regarded her with wonder and admiration. This was a new sensation to poor Bell, for her vanity had not much food at home.

We were too young to guess the real mischief that was brewing, yet we knew well enough to be aware that at last Bell’s chief delight in getting to Byer’s Bay was to meet a sweetheart.

She confided to us that a little lame, ugly, red-haired youth, belonging to one of the pilot boats, had won her affection, and that he doted on her to such a degree, that as soon as ever he had earned a “one pun’ note,” he would marry her. Even at our early age we divined the loyalty of a love secret, and while we wondered that Bell’s lover should be so ugly, and have the ill-sounding name of “Spraggen,” we never told at home.

Content to follow our favourite amusements, we left Bell and Bill Spraggen to pass the time in “courting,” as she called it, without any claim upon her attentions ; sometimes, indeed, we had to remind her of the lapse of time—a wholesome fear of the “taws,” if we were late for tea sharpened our wits. More than once we had been almost at home ere she overtook us.

A year elapsed, and still Bill Spraggen had not gained the vast sum requisite to set up housekeeping.

One stormy day, after a series of quarrels between nurse and Bell, that outrivalled the elements, and made Bell howl about the house as if some one had beaten her, the sky at last cleared, and the sun tried to shine. Tired of the house, Marblette and I asked leave to go out for a while.

Nurse gave permission, and, being a kind-hearted woman, she said to Bell—

“Pit on yer bonnet, and gang out with the young leddies, and tak care, my woman, ye don’t come back to me wi’ sore een, or I’ll sort ye.”

We, understanding nurse’s ways, were aware she meant that Bell should forget the past, cool her temper and eyes in the fresh air, and come back happy and comfortable. No sooner were we out of sight of the houses than Bell snatched hold of our hands.

“Rin, hinnies, oh ! rin, I mun get to Byer’s if I die by the way !”

The sun had gone in, the clouds were gathering again, the wind

howled in hollow gusts. We knew as well as possible it was scarcely safe to trust ourselves on the cliffs in windy weather. But such was the energy of Bell's manner and words, we ran as fast as we could go.

Conjectures that some untowered fate might have occurred to Bill Spraggen were mixed up with the more pleasurable excitement that we should see Byer's Bay in a grand storm. We ran every inch of the way. Bell did not take the trouble of cautioning us against any danger. The moment we came in sight of the cottages, she loosed our hands, and bounded forwards.

We crept down cautiously, clinging to each other, and to the stunted growth of the cliff. The wind was now furious, and stormed in a bewildering, half-stunning manner right in our faces. The roaring of the sea deadened every sound. We could not hear each other speak, though Marblette's lips touched my ear. We were a little awed, but, still determined to see our favourite arch battling with waves as high as itself, we struggled on. A little farther, and a deep cutting for a path-way down the cliff would shelter us. But we were not prepared for the wind whistling through this with a strength that almost blew us down at the first rush. We turned back, and threw ourselves on the ground to recover breath.

"Let us creep into the look-out," said Marblette, in a sudden lull of the elements.

This was a round cairn of stones, that the pilots had erected on the highest point of the cliff, as a look-out for vessels and a shelter besides.

We struggled bravely to reach it, and after being twice blown down, succeeded.

There we sat down and laughed—laughed with glee, breathless as we were. The roar of the waves, the rattling of the shingles, was still too great to admit of any words passing between us. But we were sheltered from the wind.

Perching ourselves at one of the loopholes, we saw the sight we so desired to see. The waves rushed with terrific force against the arch, the foam flew up into the air a hundred feet, and was borne by the wind even to our shelter.

As the torrents of water fell with a swishing sound, and left our beloved arch bare, still firm and bold as ever, we clapped our hands with joy. A wild merriment possessed us, born of the intoxicating wind, the excitement, the wonder of the scene.

Suddenly Marblette touched me, and pointed with her finger. Obeying her sign, I saw beneath, on the natural platform of the rock, Bell and her lover, but not, like ourselves, absorbed by the scene around them. Bill Spraggen had his arms akimbo, and his ugly face had a jeering mocking expression upon it. Could we have heard, it might have been a cruel hard laugh that was coming from his lips.

Bell was in a passion, her face all red and fiery; her fist doubled and struck out with the force of agony right in Spraggen's face. We

watched, spell-bound. As Bell's passion increased, her lover retreated ; she followed. Suddenly he seized her clenched fist, and, as if also in a rage, he threw her against the cliffs on the side farthest from the seething, roaring surge that boiled up the bay with a power that would have wrecked the mightiest vessel ever built.

She rose, and with sullen passion, seemed to upbraid him—then she became frantic—she pointed at the mad sea, she tore asunder the strings of her bonnet, and the madder wind took it. In an instant it was as if it had never been. She flew upon him, and struggled again ; he threw her away, but in their strife they had drawn near to the edge of the rock. A false step over its edge, and a plunge of twenty feet into a whirlpool, out of which there could be no escape, would be the consequence. I was ten years old, Marblette nine. I shut my eyes now, and think over that scene—it was the work of a moment ; but with a scream that arose above all the noise of the elements, we saw Bell as she uttered it, with uplifted arms, in the vortex of that awful whirlpool.

Simultaneously we sprang down ; we fell on our knees. “ O God ! save Bell, poor Bell !—lift her up out of the dreadful sea ! ” Then we ran out swift as birds. There was a lull in the storm. The sea still dashed on, it was never to be still, but the wind was quiet.

Spraggen stood with a rope in his hand, one end floating far out into the bay.

“ Bell ! where is Bell ? ” we cried, as we both pulled at him. He started with a guilty horror, and, dropping the rope, tried to get away.

“ Bell ! where is Bell ? ” we screamed.

A horrible look came over his face ; he looked at us, and then at the sea, which had carried poor Bell down into its awful caverns. We both thought he had drowned Bell, and would now drown us. But, turning deadly white, he cried with a shudder, his hands over his face—

“ She's droonded ; she slipt in of her ain sel', and is droonded ! ”

He dropped on the ground as he said these words, as if in a fit. We flew up to the cottages. The words of children have a force even in their simplicity. The women, for no men were at home, startled out of their rude, hard ways, ran down to the bay. They were absent some time ; when they returned, the senseless body of Spraggen was carried between them. With a sort of rough kindness, they forced down our white lips some very hot spirit, which though it nearly choked us, brought back the blood from our hearts.

“ Bell ! ” we whispered ; “ we want Bell to go home ! ” A vague hope urged us to say these words.

“ Bell, my bonnie bairns ?—ay, but ye'll never see the lass more, if ye saw her in the sea.”

We again told our tale.

“ Did he push her in, think ye ? ”

We were silent ; some intuition made us feel the awful importance of our answer.

"I'd best gae with the lassies hame, I'm thinking," said one woman; "if the puir body is i' the sea, it'll be mony a day long or it gives her up, if ever it do. And we dinna want folks here speering and cackling."

There was a murmur among them, and they withdrew to a corner, whispering long and earnestly among themselves. Meanwhile, Spraggen's sister, who had been attending to him, succeeded in restoring him to consciousness.

"Did ye shove her in?" she asked.

A spasm came over his face; he fell back as white as before.

"Bet, is't true?—is she drooned?" he gasped.

"The little lady lassies say sae."

Dreadful words came from his mouth. Marblette, appalled, ran to him and laid her hand to his mouth.

"Why do you say that of us?" she demanded, her little sweet face all in a glow.

"Ye'll tell her and me was fighting."

"We shall repeat the truth," she answered, with childish boldness.

"Coom awa, lassies," interrupted one of the women; "I'm gawn to tak ye hame—bide silent now, whiles I red mysel to walk with the loikes of ye."

During her absence, the other women kept up a sort of conversation amongst themselves, but we were wise enough to see it was meant for us.

"She was a feckless body, puir thing, though I wadna say ought agin her, so awfully taken——"

"I had thought mony a time as she would do hersel a mischeeve, she wor that crazy-minded about Bill."

"He hadna made his pun' ye see, and she wor mad at it. She hae told me she wished her wor dead, if she could na' marry Bill."

"Ay, mony's the time her has said that, and she wor just the bit passionate lass as wad do't."

We were aware our countenances were strictly watched as the women thus discoursed, but by this time our horror had been replaced by the more natural feeling of grief. We both cried bitterly, and said low to each other, "Oh, Bell! Poor Bell!" This seemed to have a good effect upon the women.

"Ay, they're fine and tender-hearted, no fear of them. They're little ladies, every inch, and wadna' hurt a fly, puir bit bonny things. To hae seen sic' a awfu' sight, has a'most doighted 'em."

The one who was to take us home now appeared; as if desirous to make a good impression, they all crowded round to bid us good-bye; but with a shudder we heard from the bed on which Spraggen lay, "Lassies, if ye daur say as her and me was a-fighting, I'll hae your lives, —— me if I don't."

On our way home the woman openly spoke to us of the power we held in our hands—of life and death to Bill Spraggen. She was so

far wise, she gave us no threats, but with some force painted the terrible feelings that would pursue us through life if we were the means of hanging a man. She interlarded her advice with a great many sugared phrases regarding our courage, our sense, our likeness to little angels ; and she tried to get out of us some other account of what we had seen than that we had already given ; but word for word we repeated our first tale.

"But, my bonny bairns, did ye see him shov her in?"

"They struggled, and then we saw her in the water."

Arrived at home, nurse, divining something dreadful, instantly began to take off our things, and put us into her own bed, having sent for papa and mamma to speak to the woman. Giving us each a cup of tea, that had long been waiting for us, she darkened the room, and bid us go to sleep.

Clasped in each other's arms, we essayed to do so, but previously prayed to God for poor Bell.

Then said Marblette—

"Let us pray for Spraggen, that he may leave off those words, and be good."

"Do you think he did it, Marblette?" I whispered, after we had finished.

"No," she said.

"Neither do I ;" and in a few minutes we were asleep.

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## CHAPTER V.

### ITS CONSEQUENCES.

**I**T was about ten o'clock at night when we awoke. Mamma was sitting by the bedside, and papa was reading a book at the farthest corner of the room, by the light of a shaded candle.

"My children," said mamma, with that sweet cheerful voice that sounded in our ears like angels' tidings, "you have had a nice sleep ; we watched you, darlings—you have been safe with us."

We raised ourselves as she kissed us—we saw all the baby beds were empty. A table was prepared with chicken, and ham, and cakes, and papa brought us some to eat. I can remember, now, how each mouthful tasted better to us than the last, and how we looked at each other, ashamed to ask for more.

Seeing Marblette turn suddenly pale and shiver, mamma brought us some hot sweet wine and water ; and thus strengthened and cherished, we lay back on our pillows, ready to answer papa's questions.

Very solemn they were, and we told him all. Then he prayed with

us ; and while he asked God not to permit us to forget the lesson we had learnt, in so fearful a manner, of the power of sin, yet he besought Him to comfort us, with the thought that little children as we were, we had been permitted to see such a sight, but for a good purpose. Without the truthful witness of a child's lips, another life might have to suffer for one heedlessly cast away. We must not let our minds dwell on the horrors of what we had seen, so much as on the truth that must come to light by our means.

But Marblette wrung her little hands, and cried,

" Oh ! Bell—poor Bell ! "

Then mamma lay down by us, and papa kissed and blessed us both, and, taking the candle, left us with mamma in the dark. Marblette's sobs got hushed, and mamma kept saying little soft things to us ; and it seemed to me that she kept saying them to us all night, or that we slept ; for, with the low murmur of her tender voice yet in my ears, I woke up, and it was broad daylight. Marblette was sleeping soundly, a soft flush on her face, and a pretty smile on her mouth. Mamma went gently away, and I dozed a little again.

At last Mrs. Alexander, the nurse, who always came into the house when we had a new baby, entered the room with our clean frocks and shoes.

We loved Nurse Alexander. She was very quaint in her ways, and very pleasant. She wore a great many white dimity petticoats, with what she called a coat over them. A snowy handkerchief of mull muslin was pinned over her shoulders and fastened at the throat by a garnet brooch, of which she was proud. She always wore a very high cap, beautifully starched and plaited, with a broad, black ribbon bound round it. The cap having no strings, it might be supposed this ribbon was meant to keep her cap on her head—but we knew better. Mrs. Alexander kept all her pins and needles up there on the right side of her head. Her hair was folded back at the top.

She had a fair, beautiful face, though she was old. All her features seemed to match each other, and, though she spoke broad Northumbrian, her manners and thoughts were as fine as her face.

" My little leddies must rise," said she ; and as if we had been each a newly-born child, she could not have been more tender to us, talking to us all the while in the deep, low sonorous voice peculiar to her. " The guid God sent me worrd in a drame, that the mustress haad sore need for me. I sawr in my drame two little leddies rinning, and their heeds were bar ; the curls of the anc were black and streamd far behind her i' the wind. And the fair hair o' the tither was blawed off her face, and I seed the pratty blue e'en of my leetle leddie here, and there was a morstal blast o' fearr in 'em. Then I looked behind to see what forr the leetle leddies rran wi' sic affrightment, and behind 'em came a coffin, gliding wi' no visible hands to

push it. And I looked lang, and stretched far oot to ken the letters o' the coffin, and I red the naame o' that poor, ne'er-do-weel lassie, Bell. So I awakened oop, and prrayed to the Lorrd God Almighty for the lass. And when I haad red mysel, I went till herr mither, and in ma pouch I tuk her a pinch o' tea, and a fu nubs o' whitened shuggar. And I like notified, as there worre but ill news i' the wind. But the woman (who moost be prayed furr her seffin) were no to be frighted. She wished me gone, that she might hae her kettle o' the firre, and tak the tay and shuggar whiles as sune as her could. She had, puir misguided body, sore worrds for puir Bell, when I did hap her name oot. And no to add to her sin, I did oop and shut the doorr atween her and me, and cam to ma mustress. And noo, leetle leddies, I am to bide wi' ye, and thoust to be ma bonnie little babbies."

Nurse Alexander was always great at dreams, and we listened with awe at this one, as bearing such immediate reference to ourselves.

When dressed, she took us into the day nursery, where breakfast for three was laid out. No little cups of milk, but tea and cream and white sugar, with buttered toast for us as well as Nurse Alexander—but we felt sorry and awe-struck.

When seated later on, with books on our knees, Nurse Alexander between us, knitting, we besought her to tell us some more of her dreams.

It may be thought she was injudicious, but to us there was a sort of comfort and deep contentment in the idea that the great God condescended to show His signs now, and make Himself so near to us as to warn Nurse Alexander about us in a dream, as He had warned Joseph so many hundred years ago. Perhaps my little sister in heaven, after whom I was named, had been sent to give the sign, for the sake of the little sister who was doing her duty on earth. But either way we earnestly regarded the fine old face, that talked of God and all His ways with the simplicity of one who conversed daily with Him, and read His signs in everything; and though she might have been in those ancient days an Elizabeth, or a holy Anna, or some good woman who dwelt in the Temple, and did "good works."

The first time she dreamt a dream that was to be regarded occurred when she was sixteen years old. Her father was a store merchant, and lived in Tyne Quay-side, where he did a good business with the Dutch cheese vessels, the Danish ships laden with corn and oil, the rich, but ugly coal burgers, and the rank and storm-beaten whale ships.

He traded in everything, and invested his savings in houses along the Quay-side. He calculated that as trade increased, this property would become very valuable—even now they brought him in a goodly sum yearly. All but one, and this was a house detached from all the rest, which had been built many years before it had been used as a dwelling and store-house, by an Amsterdam merchant. This merchant had a

pretty English wife, whom he loved so much that he did not care to leave her to go in any of his ships to his own country, but appointed captains, who accounted to him for what they brought and took away again.

But though making money fast, it was said this merchant of Amsterdam was not happy. His captains sometimes hinted of affairs at home that with good reason troubled him. Tyne, at that time, was a beautiful river, with a good tide-way. It had beautiful green banks, with fine woods, and well-watered valleys running up from it. And in truth there was not in all the world a more delectable place to live in than on Tyne Quay-side, in those days. Now one would as lief be down in a coal-pit.

It would seem that the trouble of the merchant grew. He began to make preparations for leaving his fair house on Tyneside. He collected his money and dues, and it was reported that he stored it in bags of gold, in an inner chamber within the one where he and his wife slept. It was said he only waited for the time of year when his ships would be returning; he sold his house to the town council, and had the money paid all in gold. At last one of his ships came in; she was his best and swiftest. When she was unloaded, all his valuables were put on board, and at night it was said he himself carried down his bags of gold. But before all things were complete, another of his ships arrived. The morning after, the merchant's house was not opened as heretofore, and the vessel that had come in the day before was gone from her moorings, without unloading so much as a hand's weight of her cargo.

But inasmuch as she had not paid the necessary dues and frontage, swift messengers were sent down to the Tyne mouth to stop her. Meantime, the merchant's house was broken open, and he was found still in his bed, with his fair English wife by his side, but both dead. A stab in the heart of each had ended their lives.

Though the other vessel was brought back, nothing transpired to tell the tale. But it appeared that a passenger, who said he was the merchant's brother, had come in her, and gone ashore that night. He was absent but a short time, and then came back, saying he had orders that they were to return at once to Tynemouth, to meet a third ship of the merchant's, which, as they knew, was waiting a tide to cross the bar. The passenger went in a boat across the bar, and got into this ship, which sailed away without ever coming into the Tyne.

Nothing could be done—justice in those days was dealt according to the supply of facts. The merchant and his wife were buried in one grave, and the town corporation took possession of the house. It was whispered the passenger was a disguised woman, and the real wife of the merchant, who had brought her from Spain.

But now for the house. It would not let—people said it was haunted—and, after many years of neglect and ruin, it was at last



sold to Nurse Alexander's father, who wanted a storehouse for whale oil. After he had bought it he found it so fine a house, with such exceeding good chambers, and so little out of repair, that he put it in order and let it.

But in every instance the tenants left it, sometimes at once, or in a few weeks, at most it was never lived in more than three months at a time. Even when he let people live rent free, they left. So that he was minded to turn it altogether into a warehouse. But, while thinking thereon, a fire broke out on the quay, which did an amount of damage remembered to this day in Newcastle. No one, for his station, suffered more than Alexander, but, of all his house property, the haunted house alone was uninjured.

Nurse had been sent to service some two years before, for the betterment of her health and manners. She was a comely girl, and her mother cared not to let her be seen on the quay, and was more especially averse to her mixing with the girls and boys who lived near and about. She was the humble neighbour or gossip of a great lady up near Alnwick, and she sent her daughter Grace to be nurse-girl at the Castle, which pleased the lady well. And for love of Grace's mother she treated her daughter more like a friend than a servant, and had her taught many fine things; and there, as Nurse Alexander told us, "she comprehended that the humblest and lowest may learn the manners of gentle folks, and be all the better for it." So, hearing of this great fire, the lady sent Grace down to see her mother, and she rode pillion on a fine horse, with a grave servant-man to guard her. When Grace arrived, she found father and mother both in the haunted house. She had leave to stay eight days, when the servant was to return with the horse and fetch her back.

So Grace bethought her no more of the grand castle, and all her fine notions, but set herself to work to help her mother settle herself with the wreck of what they had saved.

The mother, being sad and woeful, besides ill, with fatigue and want of sleep, went early to bed in a very large room up-stairs, and her father, having much property below, thought it safest to sleep there. So Grace made herself a bed in the corner of her mother's room.

She had not lain long, though she had fallen asleep at once, being tired, when she dreamed that she felt chilly. She fancied that she rose up and went to seek something to cover her, and she saw in her dream a very handsome wardrobe, just as might be in her lady's house at home. She went to it, and opened it. To her surprise there were no clothes, only a large and beautiful tree, growing out of the brown earth. The leaves of this tree were a beautiful green, but, instead of fruit, there hung from the boughs clusters of diamonds and precious stones, and intermixed were large coins of gold of the size of five-guinea pieces, and a light shone all round. So she thought to pluck what was on the tree, for the sight gave her very great delight. Once

she put forth her hand and then drew it back; as she did so the doors of the wardrobe shut with a great bang, and she awoke, startled and frightened.

But seeing her mother still sleeping quietly, she laid herself down again, first drawing some more coverings over her. In the morning she told her mother her dream, who, to use Nurse Alexander's phrase, "sorted her for being so silly."

But, in spite of her mother's anger, she thought of it all day, and, as she lay down to rest, was not a whit surprised to dream her dream again. This time she fancied she would pluck the glistening fruit, and, as she was hesitating, a hand was stretched over her shoulder, which in a few minutes stripped the tree, and all that the hand gathered seemed to run down the arm and disappear. In a great fright, cold and shivering, she awoke, and found herself sitting up in bed.

Notwithstanding her mother's anger, she told how she had dreamt nearly the same dream again, and her mother was more vexed than before, and said—

"Girl, thou shalt not lay in my room more!"

But Grace, not to be daunted, told her father all, and he said—

"My lass, thou and thy mother art sleeping in the chamber where the merchant and his English wife were murdered. I did not think on't before, being much beside myself with the sad mischances that have befallen me. Thou must move down this day—thou shalt have the closet, and thy mother shall bide with me."

"But, father," she said, "there is, under the painting of the wall, something like an old doorway. Wilt not have it opened? It is there I dreamt the wardrobe stood."

"Lass, vex me not with thy dreams, but go help thy mother, and let me hear no more."

But she could not forego looking further; and opening the panelling with an old nail, she let the nail drop within, and it seemed to fall on leather. Then continued Nurse Alexander—

"We changed our sleeping chambers, so I said no more until the horse came to take me back to my lady. Then I besought my mother to have a search in the place, and she coldly said—

"Thy father hath sold the house, and all that is left of that which was saved out of the fire, and at Lammas we take farm under my lady, for thy father is too old to begin a new life here."

"And I left with their blessing."

"When they came to the Castle, on their way to their new home, my mother took me in her arms, and cried sorely."

"Child," said she, at last, "thou wast right. There was an inner chamber, just where thou saidst was a door, and in that chamber was an old leathern mail-bag, of a large size, and its old fastenings were bursting out, showing great stores of guineas and other gold money. It was the last package of money with which the Amsterdam mer-

chant did intend to flee away with his English wife, that was, indeed, no wife, though she knew it not, because he had before-time married a lady of Spain ; and he had meant to sail away to other worlds with all his gold, and settle in a new home, where she could not find him. And this great portmanteau of leather was the last thing left, and he and she were murdered, as was supposed, by the Spanish lady. And the door being a secret one in the panelling, it was not known until he who bought the house of thy father began to pull down the walls, to make a warehouse of it."

"And did your father get none of the money, Nurse Alexander?" asked we.

"No, ma little leddies ; and it was hard, as he worr standin' by when it wor fund."

"That was a wicked man who bought the house ! I am sure you cannot pray for him !"

"Why no' ? The Lord Almighty didna see as we shud be the better o' riches. Him as got the gold is a gran' mon—or was sae, for he's deed these twenty years. But his son ye hae seen often—thon was him a-riding on a gran' horse to meet the joodge. He's joost High Sheriff !"

"What ! the gentleman whose stirrups were held by two little pages ?"

"Ay ! yon's him, and he's a mon highly respected."

Had not we but six months before admired him as the finest of gentlemen, and fallen in love with both his pages ?

"Ah ! Nurse Alexander, if your mother had attended to your dream, you would have been High Sheriff, perhaps !"

At this nurse laughed, and added—

"Reeches and goold were not for us, leettle leddies. The wealth of the Amsterdam marrchant fell in guid hands. There are none in Newcastle so respected."

But still we mourned for Nurse Alexander, though we tried to comfort ourselves with the thought that had she been a great lady, she would not now have been with us.

A knock at the door drew our thoughts to other things. It was our dinner arriving—so quickly had the morning passed. It came on a tray—three covered plates—within were slices of roast mutton and browned potatoes. We helped Mrs. Alexander to arrange the table, but we were silent, and a little sad. There was something still impending over us—we could not dismiss poor Bell and her fate, as our childish hearts prompted, as we might dismiss one of nurse's dreams.

All this seclusion and care for us showed the reality of the horror of yesterday.

## CHAPTER VI.

## ONE OF LIFE'S LESSONS.



**A**FTER our dinner, nurse recommended us to read some of the books mamma had sent us, for she was wanted downstairs. We noticed that she locked us in when she left.

We read and slept and talked low, until nearly four o'clock, when we heard with joy papa's creaking shoes coming up the stairs. We ran to meet him as he unlocked the door.

"I am going to take my little girls out for a walk," he said ; "put on your things quickly and let us begone."

He had no reason to complain of our tardiness. In a few minutes we were out in a lane that was called the Moor Lane, which we entered by a little garden at the back of the house. Had we looked up we should have seen many of our little sisters peeping at us from the windows of the adjoining house. But we were thinking how glad we were to be in the lane—how thoughtful of papa not to take us near the sea.

After chatting for some time of what we had been doing all day, and hearing the wonderful story of the Amsterdam merchant, and getting papa's opinion of the use of dreaming, or rather attending to dreams, he said—

"I am at all events glad that Nurse Alexander took it into her head to dream that she was wanted here ; for, my children, the sea did not keep your poor maid Bell down in her caverns. She was found this morning."

"Dead, papa !" we both exclaimed.

"Oh ! yes, my dears ! It was impossible to hope otherwise. But God is very good, as now her poor body can be decently buried in the churchyard, and my little girls need no longer fear looking at the sea, and dreading to see her poor battered frame thrown up at their feet. Indeed it was an especial mercy of God, for not a single fisherman whom I consulted yesterday gave me the slightest hope that on this rocky coast her body would ever be recovered. She was found lying within your favourite arch. She must have been drawn in by the current, and wedged so firmly as to remain unbruised by those cruel rocks. When the tide was out she was discovered, and brought to the dead-house in the church."

"And Bill Spraggen, papa, is he not glad she is found ?"

"He has gone away, my dear, which is foolish of him, for constables are sent out to look for him, and he is sure to be taken, and will be sent to prison, until it can be known if he pushed her in."

"But he did not, papa ; we both think she slipped in accidentally."

"I have no doubt it is as you say ; but he has given rise to great suspicion that it was otherwise, by flying from the inquiries that must

be made. You will now understand, my children, the reason I have kept you from your sisters, and have suffered no other persons than ourselves and Nurse Alexander to be with you. All the evidence for or against him must be given by two children nine and ten years old. That no one might question them or distract their minds from the solemn thoughts that a human life hangs on their lips, and that they will be sworn on God's holy book to speak the truth, and nothing but the truth, we have secluded you. At half-past four o'clock I am to take my little girls to the vestry. It is customary, when a person has been suddenly summoned out of this life into the one that is to last for ever, to call together a certain number of persons to inquire into the cause of death. As soon as the body of poor Bell was found and brought to the village, I sent to the person whose duty it is to arrange these matters, and who is called a coroner, to come and view it, with those persons whom he would select to assist him. They are performing this duty now, and at the time I mention I must take my little girls to give their evidence."

"Papa, we are not to see it?"

"I hope not, children. You have suffered enough. But even if it should be necessary you will remember that it is a duty God has imposed upon you."

"Have you, papa—" I hesitated.

"Yes, Dudu, I have seen the poor body. I will not disguise from you it is a very sad sight. When death takes possession of our earthly bodies, he puts so solemn a seal on the familiar face, that the lightest heart must be struck with awe. It is very right that it should be so."

"Have you seen many dead people, papa?"

"Yes, many, Marblette. You can remember the sad day when the Felling Colliery exploded, and so many lives perished in the pit? I was there assisting our neighbour, the clergyman of Felling, to bury the dead, and comfort the mourning. Some of the corpses were dreadful to look at, and I had need to remember. This is but a cast-away garment, now done with, and fittingly consigned to the dust from which it sprung. 'They are sown in corruption, they will rise in incorruption,' even as the little brown seed that you place in the ground rises to be a lovely flower in your garden."

"Was Bell good, papa?"

"My child, I am not her judge."

"I think I would not mind seeing it **so** much, if I thought Bell had another body in heaven."

"God is merciful!" said papa.

His voice was strange; we looked up, then we saw, for the first time in our lives, tears running down his cheeks as plentifully as tears were wont to run down our own. We hung our heads. Something seemed to whisper to us that papa grieved, even as our Saviour grieved for Sin. Bell was a sinner, and he had had charge of her soul.

We did not speak again. We turned into the church lane. As we approached the church, we saw a great crowd assembled. Loud whispers broke from them when we came in sight, and the people drew aside for us to pass through it. Papa advanced, holding one of us in either hand.

"Poor little things!" was uttered.

Papa turned and rebuked the speaker by a look. Then he said mildly—

"Do not commiserate my little girls—they are about to speak the truth."

There was a deep hush, and we reached the vestry-door. When opened it was full of people, all men, excepting Nurse Alexander. Some we knew, and some we did not. They were talking very loud when we went in.

"You are very punctual, sir," said a fussy fat man, with a sort of cheerful business voice that grated on our ears, so lately speaking on such solemn subjects. "How do ye do, my little dears?—nice little dears, older than I thought. We shall do very well—I have sworn younger subjects."

The doctor, whom we knew, now came forward, and took our hands. He held them in his, much as if we had been ill, and he was judging if we were feverish.

"They must be sworn; let us proceed correctly."

Never was so fussy a man. Nurse Alexander told us afterwards he was the coroner. We took the oath distinctly, and were much praised by the coroner for the feeling manner in which we did it. Then led by Nurse Alexander, we went into the dead-house.

"Oh! Bell!—poor Bell!"

We had some wine given us when we returned to the vestry. Then we gave our evidence.

"This will acquit him," said the coroner, "clearly he will be acquitted. You know he is taken, I suppose, sir—found skulking in a low house in Shields. This evading of justice will, however, go against him. There are no other witnesses, I suppose?"

A stir in the crowd took place, and a tall sailor advanced from among it. We knew his face, he being one of the pilots that frequented Byer's Bay.

We were taken away, but we heard that this man's evidence was very different from ours, and that the opinion of the coroner, as well as many others, was, that Bill Spraggen would be hanged for the murder, by drowning, of poor Bell. But this we did not hear that evening, for when we got home we found our eldest sister was to spend the evening with us; also Effie, the next in age to us.

It was a great honour to have "our young lady" all to ourselves, setting aside the pleasure; and as Effie was a quaint, funny little girl, we were beguiled into spending a very pleasant evening. Effie did not know what it was to be sorrowful, or even dull. Cosily fat, with great

big black eyes, dancing with light and fun, a merry mouth always showing two rows of even white teeth, like nice almonds—she was born to laugh. But neither of them said anything to us of the sad and solemn yesterday.

The next day, we understood that poor Bell was to be buried. We thought we should like to attend the funeral, and to see the last of her, because no more could any sight shock us after the one in the dead-house. But Nurse Alexander, to whom we confided our thoughts, coloured with a sort of anger.

"Leettle leddies, the woman was a sinnerr. She is i'the honds of the Lorr'd. We hae dune wi her, and I wadna wish ye to say herr naame morre."

But we had not done with her.

After ten days, papa and mamma took us away in the carriage to Durham—Mrs. Alexander still with us. The assizes were being held, and Bill Spraggen was to be tried for his life.

The evanescent nature of a child's disposition had caused us almost to return to our usual habits and thoughts. We had not yet mixed with the family, being guarded by Nurse Alexander, and taken out for exercise by papa, and having one or two little sisters in turn to amuse us in the evenings. But if we had gone back to our usual life, I am persuaded we should have been as merry as they were, and as much pleased as they expressed themselves with the new nurse-maid called Jenny.

We were not without some sort of remembrance of poor Bell; for once when nurse came with our clean clothes to Mrs. Alexander, thinking we were asleep, they spoke of her, and, to our dismay, in harsh and severe words, hinting at sin of Bell's which they could not forgive.

"I'd ne'er let her oot o' my sight, the hussie!" said nurse.

"I'm thinking her mither kenned. She worr sae harrd on herr, the mornn I cam."

"Ay, she's an evil ane tae, and I'll gie her my mind sum day. But I dunna think she cares muckle for the disgrace. Its aye whaten her loss o' wage is, and a' that."

"The mustress and the masterr hae been guid to herr. She hae gettin gran mourning, and the lass's wage to the quarter, with a pun in. I tuk it mysel, and was a'most minded to fetch it back, she worr sae thankless."

"An ill lot; I catch mysel thinking, 'Tis an ill wind as blaws nae-body guid.' This tother lass is my ain sel ower again, and sae thoughtful. I am like a leddie in the nursery!"

On the morning after we arrived at Durham, papa having prepared us for appearing in court, before the judge, and all the barristers, and a great many people, we were taken there, and shown into a small room, where we were to wait, with our father and mother, until we were called.

As for me, my imagination was more occupied in conjecturing what a court of justice was like than with the cause that brought us there. I had not been without many secret thoughts of the judgment day, when the Almighty would sit upon His throne and judge the world.

Was a human court of justice similar? There was a judge; of course he would have a "white throne" high above the rest, with robes and an appearance perhaps like Moses holding the two tables of commandments. Then the barristers—what would they be like? I did not conceive for a moment that they would resemble the accusing angels, but I invested them with a grand and noble appearance, and thought there would be rows and rows of them, sitting in countless numbers all round the judge. Altogether I had woven such a picture of what I was to see, that I was wholly bewildered when placed in the witness-box, and asked my name. (Marblette was left with mamma, and papa took me into the court.)

"She does not hear," said a harsh voice; "remove her bonnet."

I looked up and saw a grave hook-nosed man, seated on a great chair, with white falling wool all round his face. Papa whispered to me to collect my thoughts, and then withdrew.

Banishing as well as I could all the ideas that had occupied me, I answered to my name. And in reply to the question, did I know the nature of an oath, I answered clearly,

"Yes, I must speak the truth."

"Do you know what will happen if you do not speak the truth?"

"Yes, God will punish me."

"That will do, she knows the nature of an oath as well as any of us."

I was then called upon to relate that terrible scene once more.

Afterwards a gentleman with curling wool on his head, underneath which came long black hair, with a sort of black gown on, began to ask me questions.

"Did you see the prisoner strike the deceased?"

I was some seconds fixing the name of "prisoner" to Bill Spraggen—whom I now saw, poor wretch—and "deceased" to Bell.

"No, he pushed her away."

"Was she striking him?"

"Yes, as hard as she could."

"You are certain he did not strike her in return?"

"He held up his arms so, to shield his face, but did not strike her."

"When he pushed her, did she fall down?"

"Yes."

"Into the waves?"

"No, against the cliff."

"Then she rose, you say, and struggled with him?"

"Yes, and he kept stepping back and back."

"Nearer the sea?"



"Yes."

"Was his face to the sea, or hers?"

"Hers—she was looking straight at it, and we feared she would let him fall in."

"Then her bonnet flew away?"

"Yes, she tore it off her head, as if she would beat him with it; but the wind took it out of her hand, and it blew away directly. Then she flung her arms round him, and began to struggle."

"Which was strongest, do you think?"

"She was very strong, as strong and stronger than papa. I do not know how strong Bill Spraggen is."

"Can you describe the struggle?"

"He suddenly looked back, and seemed to see how near he was to the edge of the rock; and we could almost think he gave a great shout, but we could not hear it, for the roaring of the sea. Then he struggled greatly, and I cannot tell, but a great wave came—and in a minute we saw her in the water."

"Now tell me, with the truth you have sworn to by your oath to speak, do you think he pushed her in?"

I paused a minute—more that they might not think I was heedless in my answer. In that minute I saw all the colour go out of the unfortunate Bill Spraggen's face.

"Sir, if he had wished to drown her, why did he not do it when he threw her down the first time? It was as easy for him to throw her at the sea-side as the cliff-side; and when we ran down he had a rope in his hand, one end of which was floating where we last saw Bell."

"Did she wish to drown him?"

"No, she was in a passion, and did not know what she was doing."

"Did you know that he was her lover?"

"She said so, but bid us not tell."

"Did you think it right to keep such a secret from your father and mother?"

Seeing that I hesitated, the judge said I need not answer the question unless I liked, upon which I said,

"We had read that great and good people kept secrets—we wished to do the same."

"Very well answered," said the judge. "Have you more to ask, Brother Blundel? for the young lady has given a most excellent and clear statement—you had better release her."

"I was about to do so, my lord—I should be very glad if I could always make sure of so clear-headed a witness."

Papa appeared at the same moment, leading Marblette. I was tall for my age, and she was little. Moreover, she was fair and pretty, and her colour came and went like quick clouds—such a pretty colour!

Though he never said it, or showed it, somehow we all felt that

however much papa loved his other children, Marblette was his darling. So I was not surprised that, after putting her into the witness-box and taking me out, he forgot to go away. Squeezing my hand very tight, he placed his other hand on the witness-box, as if it should be ready to help Marblette.

The judge asked her age, and was surprised to find there was only a year between us.

Unlike me, Marblette's whole heart was fixed upon what she was about to do ; and when asked, as I was, if she understood the nature of an oath, she clasped her hands and said,

"I am to speak the truth, as if before God."

Her evidence was word for word the same as mine ; so that papa was summoned into the witness-box, and, after being sworn, was asked if we were tutored to say what we did.

He then detailed the means he had taken, that there should be no tampering with our testimony ; and appealed to the notes of the coroner, to show that what we said on the day of the inquest was the same as we said now ; which notes were read aloud, and he was proved correct.

Afterwards some of the women from Byer's Bay were called into the witness-box, and proved that in no one instance had we added or omitted a single fact.

"Not that the little lasses would say if he pushed her in or no, though we axed 'em."

Marblette was called back upon hearing this, and asked questions, as I was.

"If it was your opinion that the prisoner did not throw her in, why did you not tell the women so when they asked you ?"

"We were not quite sure until we had spoken to each other ; and besides, they seemed to wish to threaten us, and he said very ugly words to us."

"But you are sure he did not throw her in ?"

"Yes, because, if he had wished to drown her, he could have done so before, when he threw her down ; and when we got to him, he had thrown a rope for her to catch at."

"Did your sister tell you that ?"

"No, I thought it myself ; papa told us we were not to speak to each other about it, because—" And here her little tender heart melted, and that piteous cry,

"Oh, Bell ! poor Bell !" came from her lips.

Upon hearing which, the prisoner groaned and sobbed aloud—and I saw a great many people begin to cry. Papa was comforting and petting Marblette.

After a little while I was again called into the witness-box, and asked the following questions :

"Did the deceased go down on her knees to the prisoner, and hold up her hands, as if imploring him to spare her ?"

"No."

"Did he take her by her two hands and fling her into the sea, as a person would take a dog and throw it in?"

"No, no."

"Did she scream for help?"

"She might have screamed, but we could not hear her, because of the roaring of the sea. She screamed when in the sea—we heard that!" and I shuddered.

"I told you so, Brother Blundel," said the judge, turning to the gentleman who was questioning me, "that first witness has lied from beginning to end. I question if he saw anything. See that he is detained."

Then the judge spoke a long time, and told all the story from beginning to end, apparently speaking to some gentlemen who sat by themselves, and whom he called every now and then "jury."

But he astonished us by relating some things that we knew were not true; and afterwards papa told us that this was the evidence of the pilot, who had been examined before we were in court, and that no one believed it—which was very fortunate, as he made out a story that would have hanged Spraggen, and proved us to be great story-tellers. So we were thankful that papa had been so careful, that we should not forget or mistake a single thing.

The last words the judge said were—

"And now, gentlemen of the jury, you are called upon to decide if the prisoner is guilty or not of the inhuman crime of murdering a woman, who had so far proved her confidence in his love, as to put that last and greatest trust in it, as to make him the father of her unborn child. You will withdraw, and rightly consider your verdict."

There was a stir among them—a slight whisper. Then one rose, and said:

"My Lord, there is no occasion for us to withdraw—we are unanimous in considering the prisoner 'Not Guilty.'"

There was a buzz in court—the judge said:

"Your verdict is a just one—I thank you, gentlemen."

The man whom papa said was a jailor touched Spraggen, and shook hands with him. But he looked stupefied—hardly comprehending. Then papa took us out of the crowd, and a messenger came running after us down the steep street, as he was taking us to the hotel where mamma awaited us, and begged him to come back to the judge's lodgings. The judge wanted to see us.

When we arrived, the judge had taken the wool off his head, and his robes were gone, and he was so altered that, but for his nose, we should scarcely have known him again. He looked more like Moses now, I thought, with his soft white curls and kind gentle eyes.

He said a great many nice things of us both to papa, and he hoped should never forget this day, but remember what an awful thing

was sin, and how impossible it was to tell the lengths to which an indulgence in sin led those who would not strive against it.

Also we were not to forget him ; and, that we might be assisted to retain him in our memory, he gave us each a golden guinea, which was a fathomless mine of money. Divided into halfpennies and pennies, it seemed likely to last out our lives.

Full of strange feelings, in which self-satisfaction and happiness held a predominant position, we returned to mamma.

The next morning we had a troublesome interview with Bill Spraggen, and some of the women who lived at the cottages. In his gratitude he swore there was nothing he would not do for us.

"Don't say those naughty words again, then," said Marblette, in her little dignified way.

He promised to try. We never saw him again.

From Durham, we went straight home to our Rectory, and found all the rest of the family there. We had spent some of our wealth in Durham ; and in the excitement of taking presents to everybody at home, and in returning to our proper places in the nursery, and all that had passed, soon seemed to us as if we had only dreamt one of Nurse Alexander's "ugly dreams." We were in danger of regarding the episode of "Poor Bell" as one of excitement and wonder, more than pain.

As time softened the horrible past, that active imagination of mine turned the scene of the court into rather a favourite play. To be sure, Marblette's more sensitive nature was a little touched ; but overcome by my impetuosity, and being allowed to choose her own part—namely, that of prisoner—she entered into it at last.

Baby was judge. Her many-frilled and bowed cap was suggestive of the nearest resemblance to a wig. We sat her in her high chair in the midst, and she was duly alive to the honour, endeavouring to do justice to it, by exercising an accomplishment only just taught ; she winked and laughed at everybody, unbidden.

Effie, with one other, was jury. Excepting that she saw a great deal of fun in everything, and was always for giving her verdict at once, she understood the greatness of her position very well.

We explained to her how King Alfred invented "Trial by Jury," and what a grand thing it was, and how England was celebrated for it, and it was one of the reasons why it was the greatest nation in the world. She took in the vastness of the idea, embodied in her own and Tottie's persons, very creditably, though she was a little obstinate in wishing to be called "King Alfred Jury." We settled that fortunately by saying a female could not be king. I was Brother Blundel, and harangued and questioned and speechified to the Judge, in spite of her familiar winking, in a manner that seemed to please the whole court. For a long time, until Marblette joined us, we wanted a prisoner.

At one time it was suggested we should try a mouse for his life

But the difficulty of catching one alive, the still greater difficulty or rather dread of detaining him prisoner, while he was being tried (no jailer would offer), caused his trial never to take place.

Such are the incongruities of our nature.

Many years elapsed before we saw Byer's Bay again. Then it was on a calm and sunny day in June. Marblette and I, nearly grown up, walked there by ourselves, after obtaining permission to do so. We ran down quickly. We saw at once a great change. The cottages were in ruins—long, long ago had they been deserted. The cliffs were all changed, blasted and hollowed out, like quarries that we had seen inland.

The natural pier alone remained as it was. By its side was moored long low barges. A swarm of people were grouped in every direction, filling them with blocks of limestone.

We looked for our arch; it was gone, but a gigantic heap of broken debris showed where it had stood. Neither its beauty, nor its goodness in shielding the dead from the turmoil of the sea, had saved it from the fate of expediency. Lime was wanted all over the world. Our beautiful arch, poor Bell's sea coffin, was burnt in lime-kilns, and scattered over the earth.

We said nothing, but hand-in-hand left the spot. Half-way home—"Ah!" said Marblette, sighing out her words, "in heaven there can be no change—in heaven no sin, no sorrow, no drowning—in heaven we shall be happy—ah! Bell, poor Bell!"

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## CHAPTER VII.

### EDUCATION.



WHEN I was thirteen, Marblette went with me to live with our grandmamma, in Gloucestershire. Our eldest sister had always resided with her, and was born there—coming to visit us at home at intervals.

The house in which our grandmother lived was her own, and stood in the centre of large gardens and orchards. It was a very sunny house—the rooms lofty and well proportioned, lighted by large casemented windows with seats comfortably cushioned, on which we delighted to sit and look forth upon the fair prospect. Sloping down were green terraces of the softest, freshest turf, with here and there a bed of bright flowers that looked like gems. Roses grew in luxuriant bushes, filling the air with perfume; while honeysuckles scrambled up the boles of the trees, and made great top-knots of themselves, quite out of reach. A magnificent horse-chestnut reigned like a king over the garden, permitting a tall and graceful acacia to grow near him, as his queen. An old Scotch fir seemed to stand as a sturdy guard

behind them ; across his rough breast a snowy *Mespilus* had flung herself in a sort of wild embrace. On the other side a dark cedar spread its uncompromising branches, with an air of stately defiance of every other tree in the garden. It grew after its own fashion, without regard to convenience or space, thrusting its beautifully fringed branches straight through a crimson thorn on one side and an awkward old medlar on the other. On the same side, encircled with a spacious carpet of grass, rose a tender leaved mulberry, through whose delicate verdure could be seen the nutty brown branches, in charming contrast to the dark mantled cedar.

Beyond the garden was the cherry-orchard ; beyond the orchard, a long space of rich meadow land, that seemed to end abruptly in the broad shining waters of the Bristol Channel.

This view never seemed twice the same. Sometimes the channel was calm as an inland lake, with the sun burnishing it into a silver solid mass, too dazzling for mortal eyes to look at. No life was on it, no ship, no breeze, no ripple—it lay melting in the sun. Within a few hours it would be darkly blue, heaving with a mighty pulse, that rocked the fleet upon its bosom.

Sometimes the channel was so blurred by rain, and clouds, and stormy winds, that we could scarce discern the sea from the sky. Waves crested with foam rode out the mists, and a hollow, reverberating murmur filled the air, which we were told was the voice of the Atlantic, rushing with the impulse of thousands of miles. We felt the salt spray on our lips as we flew out, with youthful jubilation, to be blown about by the wind, and have a healthy romp with the elements.

Inland the country was rich and pleasant.

Narrow lanes intersected each other, and we soon learned where violets bloomed earliest, and in what little sheltered nook of the roots of old trees primroses first peeped forth ; where the nuts were ripest, and the fragile bells of the *Campanula patula* the most plentiful.

One deeply-cut lane was our especial favourite. The soil was not so full of clay as the others ; the bed of it was gravelly, and a bright jocund streamlet ran along with a merry gurgle. The banks of this lane were beautiful, and the high hedges on either side arched over our heads, weighed down with a glory of honeysuckles and wild roses. Here we found mosses of all kinds ; little tufts of ferns, delicate enough to shade a fairy's door ; patches of wild strawberries, whose fruit and flower studded the bank with gems ; little harebells, and here and there homely clusters of daisies, beside a great lichen-covered stone ; and a world of lovely leaflets of all sizes, all shapes, all shades of green ; and these, and even lovelier things, grew within reach of our fingers, in this cool, embowered, mossy, rivuleted lane.

Our grandmamma was particular. She would not allow the slightest infringement of her laws. We were to be dressed and in the school-room by six o'clock, summer and winter.

A certain proportion of lessons, of practising on harps and pianos, was to be gone through before breakfast—seven o'clock. Prayers and reading occupied one quarter of an hour; twenty minutes for breakfast—one cup of tea, one pat of butter, two hunches of bread.

After breakfast, and, indeed, after every meal, there was a general washing of hands and faces, and smoothing of hair; until nine, we were drilled. Back-boards, dumb-bells, walking with weights on our heads—each had their turn. Our eldest sister was called *par excellence* Sister, or Sissy. She was also particular. At nine she read aloud for an hour to grandmamma, whilst Marblette and I practised duets on the piano. At ten I read aloud for an hour, while Marblette and Sister sang. At eleven Marblette read aloud for an hour, while Sissy and I practised our drawing. All these hours grandmamma enacted Dorcas, and made “coats and garments” for the poor.

After dinner we put on our cloaks and bonnets, and went out for a ramble. In winter we remained out of doors two hours, in summer three. We were suffered to go where we liked, and do what we liked when out, grandmamma having a sort of lofty trust in us, that made us do her bidding more scrupulously than in her presence.

What a luxury was life then! What worlds of happiness we found in the green lanes! What acquaintances we made with strange things!

I had a pet snail one summer, and Marblette a little mole. As for Sissy, she was, I must confess, a little prim. Grandmamma had succeeded in making a small grandmamma of her, so that now and then she “grandmammaed” it out of doors. We had a very high opinion of her, and were disposed to treat her with every respect. But we liked to scramble up the trees, and we thought it delicious to get wet through; it was quite impossible to refrain from running and jumping, and equally impossible not to sing and laugh all the time we were out. But it fretted Sissy if we indulged in these gipsy tastes out of the garden; to be sure, she had the responsibility of setting a proper example, as the eldest.

When we came in (we were allowed four minutes to take off our walking attire), we proceeded to say the lessons we had learnt, and read over the exercises we had written; after which, until tea-time, we wrote in copy-books from grandmamma’s dictation.

Twenty minutes was allowed for tea. But, sometimes, when Thomas, the butler, who had already lived with grandmamma fifty-two years, came at the precise moment, settled fifty-two years ago, to take away the tea-things, it would sometimes happen that she was still lingering over her last cup.

On these occasions Thomas would go straight to the fire and poke it, without a glance at the tea-table.

“Is it time, Thomas?” grandmamma would ask apprehensively.

“Wants two minutes, ma’am,” answers Thomas, going outside for the coal-scuttle.

He always seemed to find the coals extremely difficult to arrange in the grate. By the time the fire was made up, grandmamma had not only finished her tea, and the last shaving of her thin bread and butter, but had swept up her little store of crumbs, and folded her soft and beautiful damask napkin; all of which being done, Thomas always made a feint of looking at the clock, and seeming startled at the time he had taken over the fire, he rushed out with the coal-scuttle, and carried out the tea-things with an air of hurry which was amusing.

After tea, we played and sang to grandmamma in turns, the others working. As the church-clock chimed a quarter to nine, Marblette rose, put her work away, knelt for a moment as grandmamma blessed her, but always had disappeared before the last chime was heard. As the clock struck nine, I did the same. To me there was something so infinitely curious, not to say bewitching, in this regard for minutes and half minutes, that I was always in a constant state of excitement trying to save even seconds. I don't think, during the time I lived with grandmamma, the church-clock ever struck the ninth time without my foot being on the second step going up-stairs to bed; and to such a pitch of skill did I arrive in the art of saving minutes, that I sometimes astonished grandmamma herself. I do not know how grandmamma and Sissy amused themselves until ten o'clock, when the servants came in to prayers.

Once or twice we asked Sissy.

She looked reserved, and seemed to think that we were aspiring to very unnecessary knowledge.

"Do you read the History of England?" asked Marblette.

"Perhaps," answered Sissy, discreetly.

If, by some fortunate circumstance, we ever had a few minutes for which there was no settled employment, and we could safely call them our own, grandmamma was in the habit of saying to us,

"My dears, you may amuse yourselves by reading the History of England."

So Marblette thought, perhaps, that Sissy was allowed from nine until ten to amuse herself. We don't know to this day whether she did or not.

Sissy was a fine performer both on the piano and harp, but it was by dint of constant practice. She had a natural talent for drawing, and considered it as an amusement rather than lesson. These were her accomplishments. In the exercise of domestic virtues she had no rival. Her worst enemy could only say she was a little "prim."

Marblette had the love and instinct for all that was beautiful, which is the temperament of genius. She had the true feeling for music and painting. She had no memory for what she read—exercises, lessons, and poetry, were only written and learnt to be forgotten by the next day. In character she was a strange mixture of gentleness and firmness, with a refinement and grace that made her seem to me a dainty



little princess. She never found fault, but she had a way of looking with her dewy blue eyes that was stronger than any reproof to me.

And what was I in those ancient days? No musician, in spite of all grandmamma's efforts. I painted tulips, daisies, anything easy, after a fashion of my own. I devoured books, and ran after the minutes. Beyond these two studies I was nothing, and cared for nothing. Grandmamma sighed over me, and could not understand how a girl, able to accomplish her tasks in half the time allotted her, could know so little of them afterwards. Out of doors I reigned supreme. I was at the top of a tree before Sissy could say, "You ought not to climb trees." I was over a wall or a hedge, heedless of consequences, until Marblette's blue eyes would warn me of a tattered frock or strangers in sight. I drank in the air, the sunshine, the loveliness of nature, with a vivacity and health nothing could control.

Grandmamma's house was guarded from the main road by a high wall. A door in it admitted the world to us, and let us out into the world. Nearly opposite one wall was another, which also had a door. This opened into the sacred precincts of the Rectory.

Here lived Mr. and Mrs. Carne, and their son Philip Carne. Grandmamma was very fond of them all, and I think it was impossible for them not to be fond of grandmamma. She was something like Marblette in her refined ways. If she was angry, she showed it only by a little stiffness mixed with her usual courtly manner. But words of reproach, or even hastiness, never crossed her lips.

On the left side of the Rectory was a little wood, through which was the pathway to church, and also the village. For we had a village—which was well-populated, too. There was Dr. Mason's house—a new one, square, built of brick, so utterly bereft of anything like taste or ornament, or anything but squareness and trimness, we wondered at anyone liking to live in it.

There was the one-storied cottage of Mrs. and the Miss Rees. This was a house we delighted in. It was all angles and ins and outs, no one window was like another, and there was no staircase in it. In our private minds, Marblette and I considered it a regular old Saxon house, with its hall in the middle, and bowers and chambers all around.

Old Mrs. Rees agreed with us that it must be a Saxon house, and was deaf to the constant rejoinder of Miss Bella Rees—

"Why, mother, you and father built the house!"

Miss Bella liked to snub her mother, and did it in a broad Gloucester dialect, which was a further offence.

Miss Rees had a temper!

In the centre of the village, close by the village pump, was a curious old gateway that led to a house something like grandmamma's. Here lived General and Mrs. Wallace, and also their sons and daughters, with wives and husbands and children. Not that they all lived together, but the old people were never alone—all their children visited

them in turn. Out of a numerous family one daughter alone remained unmarried, and always lived with them. Though we liked Audrey Wallace, still we soon discovered why she had never married—she was not pretty, and she was a simpleton. She called everybody “dear.” She was always “awfully” surprised at nothing. That is, if we brought her violets. “Violets!” she would cry out; “how wonderful! How astonishing! How awfully strange!” As if violets were things wholly forbidden to grow in that part of the world. If we had to say, that grandmamma had a slight cold. “Cold, dear! Oh, how sad!—how grievous!—how awfully shocking!” Sissy, full of good thoughts, took it into her head at one time, that Audrey’s little oddities proceeded from neglect on the part of her family. So she obtained grandmamma’s permission to try and turn her into a wise woman. Audrey was about thirty, and Sissy eighteen. Audrey was pleased at Sissy’s great interest in her, and not only “deared” her at every other word, but adopted her as her dearest and best friend. The manner of displaying this tie between them was not greatly to Sissy’s taste. There was a great deal of kissing and hugging on Audrey’s part, and a lavish development of affection before company. Also now and then she had fits of jealousy, that were extremely inconvenient, to say the least. Nevertheless, Sissy conceived that she ought to go on with her self-imposed task—and so she “oughted” it for about a year.

At the end of that time, grandmamma having persuaded herself that Sissy was working miracles, because the General was always saying so—(and Audrey certainly now tied her bonnet strings, buttoned her boots, and washed her hands, little acts she was formerly in the habit of thinking superfluous)—grandmamma was suddenly undeceived, and after this wise it happened. She was generally looked upon as the first person in the village, consequently she ruled it—or rather the rest of the inhabitants followed her example. If she gave a dinner party, of course the General gave one the following week, Miss Rees—for Mrs. Rees and Bella of course did as they were bid—the week after, and so on.

These dinners were regulated, as regarded food, by what had appeared at grandmamma’s table. If turkey and saddle of mutton—turkey and saddle of mutton appeared at the other dinner parties. If roast goose and boiled calf’s head—there was quite a demand for geese and calves’ heads. But sometimes grandmamma had a present of a haunch of venison. On such an occasion not only was the whole village invited to partake of it, and the General to carve it, but the remainder was distributed next morning, as far as it would go, to each guest, that they might hash it at home. This very friendly mode of proceeding brings me to that individual fact which stamped Audrey in grandmamma’s eyes as hopelessly “wanting.”

By certain, though imperceptible, means, it had oozed out long ago that grandmamma considered the eating of cheese as hardly

compatible with the deportment of a gentlewoman. Still she lived in a cheese country. Moreover, a very hospitable country. Among themselves the absence of cheese from the dinner-table was not only the general habit, out of deference to her, but became at last quite a little trait, in which they prided themselves. Nevertheless, when strangers intruded upon our domestic arena, and a struggle ensued between hospitality and gentility, hospitality gained the day. Grandmamma settled that question herself, and absolutely bought a cheese, with the understanding that when an emergency occurred in the household of any of her neighbours, demanding the presence of cheese, they were to borrow hers. Thus it was no uncommon thing for Thomas to appear in the very crisis of lessons, with a—

“Please, ma’am, General’s compliments—cheese.”

“Of course, Thomas, with my kind compliments,” was grandmamma’s answer, waving him out of the room, lest another valuable minute should be lost.

Miss Rees generally sent a note, “with mamma’s and Bella’s, and my love, might we venture to ask the loan of the cheese.” The note then launched out into all sorts of extraneous topics. Grandmamma disliked these notes; Sissy had to be called from her important tasks to answer them, for grandmamma considered herself obliged to send a written answer, in return for a written request; but neither did grandmamma approve of the manner in which Dr. Mason would send his medical boy to demand the cheese from Thomas, without reference to her—and keep it a week!

One day Audrey appeared at a most unusual hour in the morning, at a time when all the world knew grandmamma was as closely secluded with her three nuns as if she was a professed abbess. Audrey had a basket in her hand, which contained a cloth.

“Well, dear, how are you? How well you look?—how do I look? How snug you seem!—so busy, children, dear! And how are you, my dear lady?—quite well?—that’s awfully nice! I have run all the way!—I thought I might be in time to see the mail go by, with its prancers. It’s awfully late—the mail is!”

“You come for something,” interrupted Sissy, feeling that she was in some sort answerable for Audrey’s sayings and doings, and because grandmamma’s dear face wore its most ominous aspect.

“To be sure—so I did, dear. How clever of you to guess, you dear darling! But she is so clever— isn’t she now, dear?”

“And what is it?” again interrupted Sissy.

“Well now— isn’t it awfully odd! I declare I have forgot. My memory is not near so good as yours, dear, but I’ll just sit here until it comes back to mind. That’s one good of me—I never quite forget; sometimes it comes in a few hours, sometimes the next day, and very, very often in the night, just as I am going to sleep. Awfully odd— isn’t it? But never you mind—I’ll just sit and chat. Ah!—there goes the mail at last!—awfully full!—how they go! I love those prancing

steeds—dear me ! I think that was Philip Carne on the mail ! I am glad I nodded—he would have thought it so awfully odd if I hadn't !”

We were not allowed to speak between one hour and another—Marblette and I ; but in compassion to grandmamma, who seemed hopelessly bewildered by Audrey (for never in the memory of man or woman had anyone ever rushed and looked out of one of her windows to see the mail go by), and in pity to Sissy, who seemed even more perplexed than grandmamma—I abruptly and distinctly said “Cheese !”

Up jumps Audrey, quite delighted.

“To be sure—that’s it ! That’s just what I forgot, and how I could, with the basket in my hand, and the cloth in the basket, is most awfully odd !”

“Run down, child,” said grandmamma to me, “with the basket and cloth, and tell Thomas to take the cheese to General Wallace’s.”

Delighted at such an unusual thing as a run at an unusual time—that I had broken my vow of silence, and yet was not to be punished—delighted at the idea of delighting grandmamma with the rapidity with which I should deliver my message—I flew. What health, what a pulse, what an exhilarating gush of enjoyment shot through me !—and for so simple a thing !

Audrey was still in the attitude of astonishment in which I left her. She was saying,

“Awfully quick !” as I returned.

It was an easy task for Sissy to perform the rest of the business, and hand her down-stairs. But from that time, grandmamma threw cold water on Sissy’s efforts to teach Audrey common-sense.

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## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE BEGINNINGS OF LIFE’S WORK.

**T**WICE a year—once in winter, once in summer—grandmamma hired a carriage from Bristol for a week. During that week she and Sissy paid visits of ceremony to all the great houses round ; and also went to Bristol to shop. The General did not like this plan of grandmamma’s.

“Why not, my dear madam, have a carriage and horses of your own ? I am much mistaken if the Alveston property does not enable its owner to live in as good style as any in the country.”

“That may be, General.”

“At your age, madam, you should drive out every day. I know of a capital coachman, and a most steady pair of horses.”

"But I have already the best I want. My coachman is always the steadiest person about—my horses the most praiseworthy; and I have such a multitude of carriages. I may go in my coach one day, my chariot another, my barouche-landau in the summer, and all the while I have no trouble with any of them. I keep them all safe in my pocket."

"Ah! you mean, madam, that you can hire just what you want. That is true."

"I have heard it said a lady has little business with a stable."

"I believe you may be right, madam—but still your own carriages, your own horses," and so he would moon on. For though a very brave general, as we have heard, he was become old and childish.

It happened on one of the occasions when grandmamma had pulled her barouche, coachman, and horses out of her pocket, and was gone with Sissy and Thomas to Bristol, Marblette and I had the unwonted luxury of three hours to ourselves.

Immediately we decided to dive into the deepest of all the deep lanes. Sissy had an idea that it was rather wrong for three girls to loiter about in a lane where the sun had to glance down through an overhanging arch of briar and honeysuckle. To be sure, if a cart or a horseman came by, we must spring up the bank to get out of the way. If pedestrians like ourselves were coming down as we went up, or *vice versa*, of course there would be an inevitable crush to get past each other. These were little things that Sissy had settled long ago "ought" not to be. But Sissy was now ten miles away in Bristol, buying a new dress, and of course worrying herself to death in the endeavour to find out which grandmamma would prefer, whilst grandmamma was equally solicitous to appear indifferent, so as to leave Sissy's choice unbiassed, which state of things generally ended in a dress being chosen which they both secretly disliked.

However, to return to the lane. Marblette and I were in the deepest cut, where the rivulet took advantage of the great seclusion to make a little diversion of its own across the lane, trying the other side, by way of a variety, for its course. Marblette was singing and plaiting a coronet of fern; I was disturbing and discomforting a lot of lovely things by rooting them up, and replanting them in a sort of pattern. Suddenly we heard voices and the tread of horses advancing down the lane. Our narrow lane was one of the horse roads to a noble and picturesque ruin, a favourite resort for pic-nics. By the noise we concluded there must be a large party coming down; and, mindful of Sissy's "oughts," we sprang up the bank like hares, and, crouching down, we held on by the old roots of the hedge. Presently they came in sight. First, a lady on nothing more aristocratic than a donkey, but he must have been frisky as a war-horse, he was so tightly held by a gay young man. Then followed a heterogeneous mass of pedestrians and horse people—all the ladies more or less puzzled how to cross that niblet of a brook. We were seated just

above, and were highly amused, the fear of those on horseback being as great as the incapability of those on foot.

They all saw us, and stared, though no one spoke to us. Finally, in a few minutes, they had surmounted the difficulty—were out of sight. We were preparing to leap down again, when, as distinctly as if the words had been addressed to us, we heard it said—

“What two pretty girls!”

Marblette looked at me, I at her. We both blushed crimson, then we both laughed, but first it was rather a giggle, then more naturally, and at last quite heartily. I clapped my hands, while Marblette said—

“It is very nice to be pretty!”

Then we both sat down side by side. After a while I said—

“The voice declared we were both pretty—now you and I are very unlike.”

“Oh, I know you are pretty—I heard Phillip Carne tell grand-mamma you would grow up into a beauty.”

“Why did you not tell me that before, Marblette?”

“I did not know you cared about being pretty; you always told us you wished to be magnanimous, and generous, and lofty, and all sorts of high things, but you never said you wished to be pretty.”

“I wish it though, all the same. I told you how mamma called you, in her letter, ‘my pretty Marblette.’”

“But mamma calls all she loves ‘pretty.’”

“Perhaps those people did not mean us.”

“I think they did—why should we not be pretty?”

“Let us ask Sissy, when she comes home, if we are pretty.”

“Do you think Sissy will tell us?”

“If she says we ‘ought’ not to know, then we may conclude we are pretty.”

“She will probably say our question is a very silly one.”

“Then I shall know we are pretty, because if she could with truth say ‘No,’ she would say it as a proper check to vanity.”

“Why should we be vain? We did not make ourselves.”

Thus discoursing, Marblette and I did not discover we had a listener. One of the gentlemen had returned, and was not only gazing at us, but evidently highly amused at what he overheard. Utterly abashed, we “whirred” like two partridges over the hedge, and fled with a speed that nothing could overtake.

Sissy would have been pleased had she seen how thoroughly the vanity of being pretty had given way to mortification. Our cheeks had not ceased to tingle with blushes when grandmamma and Sissy returned.

Dinner passed in the usual silence on our part, and in small chatting on theirs. By degrees, as we listened to scraps of their adventures, we forgot our own. The advent of a “new frock” was a matter of deep interest and curiosity to us. We gathered that, as our new chintz frocks were embellished with small rose-buds, the ribbon of our Sunday bonnets was to be green.

The always important affair of Sissy's silk dress was not alluded to, from which we inferred that the difficulties in choosing it had been greater than usual; and it was therefore not desirable to mention that subject. Grandmamma had an idea that there was some mysterious economy in purchasing in summer what would be required for winter wear, consequently we received from her, with doubtful gratitude, the present of a black fur tippet and muff, to each of us. Much as we admired them, the time being June, it would certainly be five months before we could use them, which was a great drawback on the pleasure of having them. No relaxation of our evening duties was allowed, and as the church clock chimed the three-quarters, and again the full time of nine, Marblette and I departed to bed without even asking the two great questions uppermost in our minds—"Whether Sissy thought us pretty?" "And her new dress was more ugly than its predecessor?"

We determined to keep awake until she came up-stairs. But nature conquered both vanity and curiosity—strong passions though they are.

We were sound asleep when Sissy, anxious for our approbation, slipped in, unknown to grandmamma, to show us her dress. To be sure she ought not to have done so, but our premises had been wrong. Her dress was a very pretty one; they had not mentioned it at dinner, because it had been a simultaneous choice, and both were much elated and pleased with themselves at such a phenomenon. Hence, in her excitement, Sissy had been moved to forget her "oughts."

If sleep overtook us at night, we revenged ourselves in the morning. By five o'clock we had seen the dress, and duly admired it; but when it came to the putting of that other important question, we were both too shy. We lost the opportunity, and it was not until one of those wet days in July, that will persist in drenching the world just when the hay is about to be carried, that we found the necessary time and courage to propose the question.

We told our story up to the remark,

"What two pretty girls!"

"And were they pretty?" asked Sissy innocently.

We looked aghast. Having brought our tale to a splendid climax, and in the most delicate manner given Sissy her cue, neither Marblette nor I could say, "We were the pretty girls!"

But at last I stammered out,

"Sissy, do you think us pretty?"

A pause.

As plain as if it was written in ink, did we see by Sissy's countenance that she was revolving the expediency of saying, "Yes." Ought she to make us vain? Against this was—might it not be of service to tell us we were pretty, as then I should perhaps take more

pains to hold up my head, and Marblette would be more tidy about her hair.

The good Sissy compromised the matter, and said at last,

"I think you are rather pretty."

The stress upon the personal pronoun was meant to keep us humble, as though she, our sister, might regard us with partiality, others might not do so.

I forgave her this, but not the rather.

"Don't you know," said I, "I never mean to be a 'rather,' I will always be a 'very.'"

"Very ugly," said Sissy, smiling.

"Very well," I answered, pouting.

And so the matter ended. At least for the present.

I own I was constantly casting furtive glances at all the mirrors within sight, and arrived at the conclusion, as I flew past the one in the corridor, that running a message was becoming. The flushed rosy face, the parted lips, the flying curls, and flashing eyes, were without doubt, or "ought," each and all pretty. And the certainty of this gave me very great pleasure. Perhaps the more so from having been one of those thin, dark, lanky children destitute of all the graces and prettinesses of childhood. Also, I had no praise for being accomplished like Sissy, or talented like Marblette. So that the dawning of a hope that I might be pretty, touched me pleasantly. Marblette did not seem to care much whether she was pretty or not.

Shifting these, my thoughts of beauty, from myself to her, I began to consider that she must always have been pretty. Her soft sweet face was coloured by a bloom that no flower in nature could excel; nor could the sky show a purer blue than her eyes, that were beautifully placed beneath a brow, broad, indented, pure and white as ivory. Yet the feature which pleased me most was her nose. I have never seen one like it; it was exquisitely refined.

So the more I thought upon Marblette's beauty, the more I was convinced Sissy was wrong to use "rather" to her—*ergo*, she might have been as wrong in using it to me; but then I was obliged to own that I greatly blemished mine by untidiness, and I now began to feel that it was necessary to amend in this respect.

Having advocated Whig principles in our nursery so long, I had become a renegade, and comforted myself under many a disgrace by the thought that Tories were a very slow set. Reform was much needed everywhere, so as to enable one to be tidy, without being precise. Was it an absolute condition of society that, if I had eight buttons on one boot, I must have eight on the other? Was it altogether incompatible with being a good girl, that I must not be the least in the world of a romp? Surely the most bigoted Tory going would not advocate hypocrisy—bidding me reserve my animal spirits for strict privacy? The Whigs would devise how to use the super-



abundance, or, at all events, make room in the world to let it have fair play.

That had been my idea of things.

Now, I thought, if my curls were kept in better order, I might be prettier—I felt ashamed if my boots were not properly buttoned—I recognised the propriety of being quiet and ladylike. I looked at Sissy, whose brown hair was as smooth as satin, whose dress looked as fresh as if just put on, whose gloves were all mended, her pretty feet kept in equally pretty boots, and I caught myself saying,

“Perhaps I should be prettier if I were a little prim.”

Sissy began to perceive signs of amendment, and thought with complacency that her admission had taken the right course. It had not made me vain, but it was about to make me tidy.

“Vanity dims people’s reason as age dims my eyes,” says grandmamma one day at tea, apparently *à propos* of nothing at all, unless it was Thomas, who was surveying his well-arranged tea-table with pleased and satisfied eyes.

I thought, “Perhaps grandmamma catches me looking in the glass.” Sissy, being sensitive, coloured—“Perhaps grandmamma thinks I have been flattering these girls.” Marblette, being intent upon her bread and butter, had not seemed to heed anything else. Whether the remark was intended for Thomas, Sissy, or me, or was merely a passing thought of grandmamma’s, we don’t know, but Sissy acted upon the hint. Henceforth we were told we ought to think modestly of ourselves.

But a great event occurred when I was little more than fifteen, which threw down all the earthworks of humility and diffidence raised up with such care by grandmamma and Sissy. I had an admirer! He was the gentleman who had returned to look at Marblette and me the day we sat on the hedge in the lane, just awakened to the fact that we were pretty. He had obtained an introduction to grandmamma, and seen us often since. But, inasmuch as he was upwards of thirty, was a grave, rather proud, reserved man, it never entered our heads that he would wish one, still so much of a child as myself, to be his wife.

He had early made known his intentions to grandmamma, who had written to papa, who had utterly forbidden it to be mentioned to me while I was so young. But, having waited a year, and seeing that I was now tall and womanly—(I was taller than Sissy), more grave and sedate—he would wait no longer.

Notwithstanding the strictness with which she brought us up, grandmamma was not proof against the compliment of this proposal of marriage to one of her nestlings. Vanity dimmed her eyes as well as age. She took the part of my lover, and wrote to urge my father’s consent. In the meantime, I was as much in the dark about the matter as if I had been a nun in a convent. The first suspicion that Marblette and I had that some event out of the common was impending, arose from the sudden appearance one day of papa.

The first impression was by no means pleasant. I felt that having a lover was a most embarrassing thing, and agreed with grandmamma when she said she would have preferred that I should know nothing about lovers and such nonsense, until I was actually married.

Papa showed me my lover's letter, wherein he stated his reasons for wishing to marry me, and I own I read with great, though secret exultation, that he thought me "lovely," yet he was even more smitten by my artless sunny disposition. I hoped Marblette might read the letter, too, as I did not know how I should tell her these nice things—yet how could I leave her in ignorance?

The rest of the letter detailed his fortune, and what I should have if he died—which I thought a generous thing of him, in fact, very sensible of him. It somehow seemed to me a comfortable idea that he should be dead; my embarrassments regarding him would thus be ended. Grandmamma pleased, papa no longer anxious, I married, and no one to interfere.

But there was no such termination to my difficulties. When I returned the letter to papa—

"Well," said grandmamma, "the child now knows the honour done her. She is too young to judge for herself; it is well, therefore, that we should do so for her, and desire her acceptance of so eligible an offer."

"Suffer me to ask her a few questions, my dear mother," papa answered. "Child, do you love this man?"

To love at fifteen! Was it possible? No. Life was just opening upon me such lovely and delightful things. I was in love with the air, the flowers, the sweets of breathing, living existence. I was all love from very happiness, but it was in love of everything. I was just inhaling the perception of a certain mysterious power in my hands. I was tasting the ecstasy of conferring an ecstasy—but all this only shut my heart more against the power of an exclusive love. It seemed to me that, if I married now, I closed the door against all the anticipated delights of maidenhood. Scared by an unknown something, I exclaimed hastily,

"Oh! no, papa."

"We could not expect that she should, my dear son," said grandmamma, severely.

"Do you like him?" continued papa, unheeding her.

At that moment, in my fear and trepidation, I should have liked to have said,

"Oh! no, I hate him!"

But I replied,

"I cannot say."

"In marrying," said papa, "a woman must be content to leave father, mother, everything for her husband's love."

"And Marblette," I half whispered to myself.

"Sisters and brothers—henceforth and for ever her duty is to her husband, her love and obedience."

"Papa, I am too young, I cannot do it—I am frightened."

"The child is right—calm yourself, my little girl. Your lover must give you up, or wait till you are older. It must not be, mother; tall and womanly she looks—but she is, as you know, very childish. Excellent he may be, only he is of a reserved, proud nature. Between the two, may be, these qualities will clash."

"She will never have such another offer," murmured grandmamma.

"Perhaps not, in a worldly point of view," answered papa. "Now, you may run away, my child; and, because a gentleman has been so kind as to be smitten with your pretty face and girlish ways, don't spoil the one and destroy the other by vanity."

With the sensation of having had a happy escape, I kissed papa, and flew to find Marblette, whom I locked in my arms in a fervent embrace, with a feeling of fright, now that all was over, at the narrowness of my escape. Nobody but myself knew how near I had been consenting to be married, from the habit of obedience to grandmamma.

I should say here that my lover did not wait till I was older, but almost immediately went and married some one else. Grandmamma did not fail to point this out as a lesson to my vanity.

The following Christmas we went home for the holidays. We were to remain at least two months, as grandmamma, who had been ailing for some time, was to go to Cannes for change of air, and Sissy was to accompany her.

During these holidays I had another lover. He was a barrister, or rather a parody upon one, the son of an old friend my mother had invited to pay us a visit. He happened to arrive just before luncheon-time, and I coloured with vexation that he should see me with my back-board. A solemn promise to grandmamma to wear it every day until two o'clock had never been broken as yet. The scarlet morocco bands were very conspicuous on my dark dress. To do away with its humiliating effect, I put on a disdainful air. His town-bred experience had never made him acquainted with the blushing high-mightiness of a country maiden. So he became my admirer at once.

I had confided to Marblette that, if ever I had a lover again, I hoped to be courted, and not written about in a letter, as if I was a piece of goods.

My new lover courted me so assiduously, that I was very much embarrassed. He did not permit me to feel at ease one moment of the day. He watched every word I said, every movement I made. He would allow no one else to come near me, and he paid me all manner of caressing and troublesome attentions. He wheeled papa's private arm-chair out of its place to set it for me, who had hitherto never been allowed to sit in an arm-chair at all.

He would take mamma's reading-lamp from her very elbow that I might not spoil my lovely eyes by insufficient light. Finally, he told me he was miserable out of my sight, which made me tell him frankly

that I was miserable in his. I longed for the end of the holidays to release me. My little sisters began to murmur at his engrossing all my spare time, and revenged themselves by calling him ugly, and drawing caricatures of him.

Why he courted me nobody knows, for he never proposed. Neither father nor mother seemed to care about his attentions. Papa sometimes laughed at his ways, but neither he nor mamma seemed to attach any importance to them. It was taken as a matter of course that he should consider himself as my devoted slave. He did not aspire to be anything else, and as he never made me an offer, I never had an opportunity of refusing him. I was really glad when the holidays ended, as I had become very tired of him. We met frequently in after years, and it was always the same devoted courtship on his side and annoyance on mine. He remained single—whether it was for my sake or not, I cannot say. He kept up a correspondence with me for many years. His letters invariably began, “Adorable” or “Divine creature,” and ended with “Your slave.” He was to the end a faithful and devoted bore.

Our little sisters were rather anxious Marblette and I should marry, in order that two of them, the next in age, might come to live with grandmamma. They were dying to experience the delights of wearing silk frocks, and making a rustle with them. Also it seemed to them to be such a grand thing to take a purse out of the silk pockets of the silk frock, and to give a beggar the munificent sum of sixpence. But, sad to say, our own stay with dear grandmamma became very precarious.

Miss Rees told us, with great abruptness, shortly after we returned to Alvestone, “That grandmamma was breaking up.” Poor Sissy, who was never known to be in an ill-temper in her life, was really angry at this speech; she rose, and was about to leave the house, followed by me and Marblette, but Mrs. Rees begged her pardon, rebuked Miss Rees, and we sat down again. Perhaps no more would have been said, but Miss Bella must needs jerk out the words,

“Just like Miss Rees, she is always saying what she should not.”

The two sisters always called each other “Miss Rees,” and “Miss Bella.”

Miss Rees had taken her mother’s reproof pretty well, but to be snubbed by a younger sister was not to be tolerated; so there was a sharp quarrel, which forcibly impressed on me the hearty truth of the words, “A soft answer turneth away wrath.” We made a hasty retreat, out of compassion to Mrs. Rees.

When we were fairly out of the house, Marblette and I were severe on the conduct of the Misses Rees; but Sissy, usually so sententious, was silent. We appealed to her, she tried to reply, but her voice failed, and finally she threw herself on the grass, and sobbed aloud.

How strange it is that in the full flush of youth, health, and spirits, there should be an apathy towards signs of grief. We tried to comfort

Sissy, but we felt more surprised at her unusual agitation than anything else. We were inclined to be still more angry with the Misses Rees for making Sissy so unhappy, and ourselves so uncomfortable. Fortunately she remembered in good time that grandmamma disliked red eyes and noses. So she took heed to one of her own "oughts," and swallowed her tears and grief almost as speedily as they had broken forth.

We walked home in silence. Sissy, I know, was making solemn vows to herself to do a great deal more to please grandmamma than ever she had done before. Which was needless, as she now only lived to do her will.

Marblette, I saw by the knitting of her brows, was lamenting that the Misses Rees were human beings like herself. She was wishing they had been gnomes, or Patagonians, or female Afrites, or something, in fact, whom it would be her duty to hate.

As to me, I was very miserable, not only about what Miss Rees had said of grandmamma, but I felt very melancholy about things in general, and I began to think of all the disagreeable things I had ever known or heard of. I thought how sorry we had been to leave home, though we might have been very happy with grandmamma, if Sissy had not always been plaguing us with her "ought" to do this, and "ought" not to do the other, until it became a question whether it were possible ever to do right; and then how unpleasant it was to be always failing—it seemed like a hard lesson, which I did not know how to learn. I wished it were easy to be good—I wished that grandmamma might be restored to health; and then I went off into wishes about learning all my lessons, and saving my time, never losing any half minutes and minutes; and then these aspirations faded away into childish wishes about new and beautiful lanes, to be out in thunderstorms—to have lots of cherries—and not to be troubled by either illness, quarrels, or lovers.

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## CHAPTER IX.

### THE SENSATIONS OF TEMPER.



MY meditations were interrupted by General Wallace, who called to us from his garden gate. We obeyed his wishes, and returned with him to his house—my mind vexing itself again with a melancholy doubt regarding him. He had greeted us as usual, with those high-flown compliments that old gentlemen think it necessary to bestow upon pretty young girls. And though accustomed to his style, and rating it for what it was worth—merely the good-natured babblings of simple old age—yet, in the mood I was, I

began to doubt the good of having any beauty. Pleased as Marblette and I had been at the idea of being pretty, what good had it done to me? Embarrassed me with two very uncomfortable lovers; and it seemed very stupid to be married—at least when I looked at the married people I knew. I was, I fear, in a thorough ill-humour—and nothing looked bright or pleasant.

The good General had called us in that we might hear him read a sonnet of his own composing. He was very fond of poetry, and celebrated the smallest incident with an original ode. The one we were about to hear was addressed to grandmamma—being an invocation to the Almighty to grant her restoration to health. When we were seated, he began:

“May He who sits——”

“Sits!” exclaimed the Mrs. Wallace, who lived in a state of permanent criticism, “who says He sits? General—you are profane?”

“God forbid, my dear Sarah!” exclaimed the General, who was remarkable for being very devout.

“Put it by—the girls shall not see it, or hear it, until I have supervised it!”

“Quite correct. Sarah, take it—and if you find anything that—that borders—that touches—in short, is not what you wish, put it into the fire, and I will write another. Meantime, not to disappoint them, I will let them hear the ode to our new gardener.”

“I don’t think they look much disappointed—one has been crying, the other looks sulky, and as for little Marblette—I should say she had been in a passion. You will oblige them much more by letting them go home, and hearing your ode another day.”

“But, Sarah—I called them in—a little luncheon, perhaps.”

“They dine early, and don’t know what luncheon means.”

“A glass of wine—a biscuit.”

“They are not allowed wine, as you know, and I have no biscuits. But, as you must be hospitable, take them into the dairy. Audrey is there, meddling as usual. Give them each a bowl of cream, and tell Betty to let you have a backstone cake out of the oven. I smell them baking even here, the careless hussies!”

We knew better than to refuse such treats, independently of the sharp scolding we should incur from Mrs. Wallace—the pain we should inflict upon the General. We did ample justice to the good things ordered for us, as Mrs. Wallace took care to tell grandmamma afterwards, saying we owed her three pounds of butter, having drunk up cream sufficient for that. But she said it pleasantly, and we knew she did not begrudge it. Growling and grumbling were parts of her being.

Grandmamma’s health did not mend, notwithstanding the General’s sonnet. She broke up her establishment for a year, and went abroad. Sissy of course accompanied her; Marblette, whose talents deserved it, was sent to a first-rate school in London; whilst I, being now

seventeen, went home to assist in the education of my younger sisters.

Before we separated, it became known that Philip Carne wanted to marry Sissy. Consent was given, but as they neither of them had enough money to live on, they were not to be married at present. I was curious to see how Sissy would behave under the embarrassment of having a lover. It did not seem to alter her in the least. She was neither fidgety nor embarrassed ; she did not even blush.

"Oh !" said Marblette, in explanation, "but I think Sissy has been really engaged to him ever since she was born, and so they are accustomed to it. Only we are not told ; and it is mentioned now because mamma thought it would be a good thing if they married at once, and Philip went to take care of them 'abroad.'"

"And why is not that done ?"

"Because Sissy says nothing shall come between her and grandmamma, until grandmamma is better."

"What does Philip say ?"

"Philip says that Sissy can do no wrong in his eyes."

"Just what Tom said to me."

"Yes—but that was, if I remember right, when you insisted upon going to skate with a lot of rude boys—on the Fell. Sissy is quite different."

Grandmamma and Sissy started for Cannes, and the same day Marblette and I travelled home ; and, on the following week, Marblette went to school in London. Parting from Marblette was my first sorrow. I missed her dreadfully, not only for the companionship which was broken, but I missed her gentle influence and example. The change to home life did not improve me. The rigid rule under which grandmamma had kept me was too suddenly withdrawn ; for, in deference to my womanly looks, my mother gave me the liberty and privileges of being "grown up," and I did not know how to use them—they came too suddenly, and at a dangerous time. I was left to myself without any companion. My mother was fully occupied all day long, and though I loved my younger sisters dearly, and they loved me, yet they were not companions. The governess whom I was to have assisted in teaching the younger children I disliked extremely, for she lectured me severely, and yet never said anything that influenced or impressed me. I am afraid I was very cross and snappish to her. The leisure moments that formerly were so precious and delightful, were now so many and frequent that they were a burden. Left to myself to employ my own time, I did not know what to do ; accustomed as I had been to have once a set occupation for every hour in the day, I lost all my zeal in saving minutes, for I had no object upon which to spend them. I began to develope all the faults I had ever blamed in other people—cross, idle, gossiping, fault-finding—all for want of occupation, and a steady rule of life.

I was in this desultory, unsatisfactory state when a cousin of ours

came to be my father's curate. He professed to take a great interest in me. He lent me books, taught me conchology, assisted me to practise archery—in short, took as much trouble about me as if I had been the whole parish.

I took it all as a matter of course ; but one morning he came to bring me some shells he had received from Ceylon. I was alone in the drawing-room ; my mother had gone to give orders about a poor woman, my father was out, the children were at their lessons. I thought nothing about it, but asked him to stay and show me how to arrange the collection of shells which I was beginning to make. To my dismay, instead of doing so, he asked me to marry him. By this time I had come to think that being married was a very stupid and disagreeable condition of life ; but he asked me as if it were a matter of course that I must say yes—he seemed quite to expect it, and although I wished he had not asked me, yet I was afraid of offending him. I told him the first thing that came into my head, which was ridiculous enough—that if I married him, I should not change my name, and I thought that a serious objection.

He replied, that this should be a recommendation to me, as it was not only a good name, but that my father had made it revered and honoured.

Well, that was true. Of course I was proud of my name on account of papa, if for nothing else, and here I paused. I had not courage to tell my cousin that I did not like him, and did not want to marry him—he was very good as a cousin, and I did not like to vex him—so I began to twist my fingers in my handkerchief and look foolish—I could think of nothing else to urge as an excuse, and he took my hand, and said :

“Dearest !” (I would rather he had said “Toad,”) “I shall soon be in priest's orders, and then I shall cease to be your father's curate, and I am promised a very nice living in Yorkshire ; there is a beautiful rectory, and, with you as its charming mistress, I shall not envy the archbishop.”

I felt as if I were being drawn into acquiescence, whether I would or no—so I said :

“But I thought you liked Marblette the best—you always said so until to-day.”

“And I thought so until lately, but it is not possible to see you every day, as I have done, and not to love you. Your frank and charming manner eminently fit you to become a clergyman's wife ; besides, you are so strong and active !”

“Pray, do you want a housemaid ?” said I, angrily, but very thankful for a pretext to quarrel.

“No, no, dear ! do not be so impetuous. As a clergyman, it is my duty in marrying to consider what will be suitable to my parish as well as to myself.”

“I hate the parish and parish work !” said I, impatiently.



"But, dear Dudu, you should not say so. You ought to like the duties of a clergyman's daughter, and I hope wife; we do not come into the world to please ourselves—you are speaking like a child, as you are."

"I shall be seventeen next month, cousin," said I, with dignity; "but I do not wish to marry yet, nor to think about it for seven years to come. What has put it into your head all at once to want to marry me?"

"I have been thinking of it for many months; I feel assured that your parents will sanction me, and you attract so much admiration that I feared if I did not speak to you at once I might lose you."

I was beginning to feel as one does in a dream when we cannot speak or run away from some danger that is threatening us. There was a dry assurance and self-sufficiency in my cousin's manner that was detestable; he was making himself inexpressibly distasteful to me, and yet I could not manage to say that I would not have him; every moment I felt more and more as though under the spell of a bad dream, from which I could neither awaken nor escape.

"I shall of course speak immediately to your father and mother," continued he, "and tell them I have spoken to you, and that you permit me to ask their approval."

"But, cousin," I gasped, "surely you do not consider me engaged?—I don't mean to be—I don't wish to be."

"Well, but surely you have not been deliberately misleading me all these months! I have been too abrupt, perhaps, in speaking to you without preparation. Pardon me, and in your calmer moments you will recognise your real wishes."

It was weak and foolish in me, I know, but the fear of having misled him and made myself liable to a debt of honour made me afraid to protest. I was ready to sink into the ground. I heard him saying,

"Trust me to read your dear fluttering heart!" and then he put his arm round me, and was proceeding to kiss me; but that broke the spell—with a sudden cry I dashed away his arm, and ran out of the room—frightened, and humiliated, and angry!

Outside the parlour door, I paused for a moment to reflect where I should go to compose my scared and scattered wits. Our house was so thickly populated, that there was no certainty of being left quiet and alone for a moment; for everyone knew exactly where everybody else was to be found. My own room was the resort of anybody who had something to do, which nobody else would tolerate; there was a sewing woman at work there at that moment—the nurseries were like bee-hives—the school-room was the play-place also—mamma's room was sacred—there was absolutely nothing left as a refuge for me in my need of solitude but the great garret, about which the mysterious fears of my childhood still lingered. There was positively no other place where I could be sure of being left

alone but this garret. So up the nursery stairs I ran as quickly and quietly as I could, and, unlocking the great door, entered in ; but I could not get over my vague dread of the place sufficiently to shut myself in ; I left the door ajar, and sat down upon that uppermost twentieth step, where I had never ventured except once in my life before. I could hear the hum of the nursery, and through a little chink of a skylight on the landing I could catch a glimpse of those who passed through the red baize swing door out of the old house into the new. So though quite alone, I was not altogether out of humanity's reach.

As soon as I settled myself in my refuge I hid my face in my hands, that face which had been so nearly polluted as I considered it, though I tried to think that a cousin was a sort of brother ; but it did not comfort me. I cried and shivered, and for the first time in my life felt miserable ; also I felt very wicked, and inclined to hate everybody, myself included ; but my cousin most of all—he was so ugly, and he had wanted to kiss me ! Marblette and I had long ago settled that our cousin was very ugly, but until to-day I had never cared about the fact. He was very tall, very thin, very narrow-chested, and he stooped. He had an ugly manner of walking, with his feet very much turned out. As to his face, it was gentleman-like and intelligent, but his mouth (that mouth which had been so nearly touching mine) was full of the most extraordinary teeth that ever were seen—they were long and discoloured, and huddled over one another, filled his mouth like a bundle of sticks. I took myself seriously to task for being so childish, and I tried to think that it was wrong to hate him because he had said he loved me ; but then the recollection that he had also said, “ I was strong and active,” enraged me as much on reflection as it had done at the time. All my self-complacence about my good looks was taken out of me for a time. I was disgusted with myself and everything else. I suddenly recollected what he had said about feeling sure of my parents' sanction, though I had not paid much attention to it at the moment ; but now it came back with a bitter sting. Mamma wanted me married—there were so many girls, she wanted me out of the way, and would have liked to see me married to my cousin, or to anybody, no matter who. It was true that mamma had never said or intimated anything of the kind ; indeed, only a few days ago she had said that when I went back to grandmamma she would miss me more than she could say ; and I had felt so pleased and so proud of this praise ; but now all that was over. I had worked myself up to a pitch of self-misery that made it quite evident to me that I was in the way at home—that nobody wanted me there—that nobody cared for me, and that both papa and mamma would rejoice to see me married to my cousin—perhaps they had even told him so. Instead of loving no one myself, it now seemed as though no one loved me.

At this moment a sweet little voice called “Dudu ! Dudu ! I want oo, Dudu !” It was baby calling me. Our last baby was now

old enough to walk and talk, and had not been yet superseded in her privileges by a later arrival. All down the stairs, all along the passage, through the hall to the drawing-room door, I heard the call, "Dudu ! Dudu ! where Dudu gone ?" But I closed my heart against the voice—I preferred to indulge my miserable thoughts. Tempted to begin by discontent, I went on with ill-temper, fancying myself more and more ill-used. I nursed my pride and self-will, and cherished ideas of setting up a will and a way of my own. Like a disease which has long been lurking in the system, and which breaks out at last upon a trifling accident, so vanity (my besetting sin), which had been kept out of sight by grandma's efforts at repression, had insidiously grown and gained strength under the more genial atmosphere of home, until vanity, folly, and recklessness had collected into a focus, and now suddenly broke out into a great fever of evil thoughts and ideas. I was, as my cousin had said, "still a child," and a very silly child. My tears fell faster and faster, but at last they came more quietly. I began to think that I had acquitted myself of the part allotted to me disgracefully ill. No child could have been more absurd—to object to so solemn a thing as an engagement for life, "because I should not have to change my name !" No wonder my cousin had taken advantage of such a foolish answer, to assume the part both of proposer and acceptor ; and if he carried his point (as I secretly feared he would) and married me, why, I should have brought my fate upon myself by my own heedlessness. I was very ashamed, but I was also very miserable. Life therefore seemed as though all pleasure had gone out of it ; all my enthusiasm, my youth, my hopes, seemed to have passed away with my sixteen years, never to return. As I sat thinking to myself thus mournfully, a slight noise in a corner of the garret made me start. The fear was momentary, for I had reached that pitch of reckless misery I could have faced a ghost and not cared. I wiped away my tears, and, rising, went to the spot whence the sound had seemed to proceed. Down in a snug old box lay five kittens, like downy balls ; their bright eyes peeping up at me with a mixture of sagacity and fear. Stooping gently down, murmuring " pussie, pussie," I stroked them ; and when I had got them into that state of happiness and familiarity that they tried to purr, I took them into my apron, utterly forgetful of all my miseries, my cousin, my red eyes, and my sad fate. I ran down to show them to the nursery. The pleasures of our nursery were so simple, that there was a wild excitement immediately all through it on seeing the kittens. Even the nurse was charmed, but none were so much pleased as the old mother cat, who, far from resenting this discovery of her offspring, endeavoured to show her sense of our admiration by every feline grace she possessed. As for baby, she kissed her dear Dudu a hundred times for this exquisite pleasure.

And so, all of a sudden, my misery vanished ! I felt glad only the garret stairs knew how silly I had been. I was humble with a sense

of the wicked thoughts I had ; but I was also wiser. The kittens had diverted my thoughts into a more healthy channel, and as we all went down in a body to show them to mamma, I decided to tell her and papa everything.

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## CHAPTER X.

### PREPARING FOR THE WORLD'S WORK.



IN the evening, as I was debating how I should open the matter, papa sent for me to his study. He was very grave ; instead of any little joke, a pinching of my ear, or an invitation to sit upon his knee, I was told to take a chair.

"My child," he began, "I am about to give you pain. I fear that I cannot consent to your marrying Robert."

"Oh, papa !" I began, with my usual hastiness ; and then stopping as I remembered I had promised myself never to be hasty any more.

Papa looked up, and attentively regarded me through his spectacles.

"Oh, papa !" repeated he, rather puzzled ; "that sounds rather joyful, child ; what is coming after 'Oh, papa ?'"

"That I am glad, papa, you have so decided ; my cousin is no doubt a very estimable person, but I do not love him at all."

"Nothing can be more frank and straightforward. Why did you not tell him so ?"

"I was taken by surprise, and was altogether a little persuaded into it."

"Then my mind is much relieved ; but your mother thinks you are much in love with Robert, and that you wish to marry him."

"That is quite a mistake, papa, and I am very sorry if I have said or done anything to make her think so."

"I fancy it was Robert himself who told her."

"He said he would not take No from me."

"Then you did refuse him ?"

"Well, papa, I said I did not like the idea of being a clergyman's wife. I was not fitted for it—and—and if ever I married, I should at least like—that it was usual—to change one's name."

"Humph," said papa, trying to hide a smile, "very cogent reasons indeed. I begin to think perhaps that Robert was right in concluding your 'No' was a 'Yes.' But my reasons for refusing my consent are cogent also. I have two : The first, his health. He is the only survivor of a large family of children, all of whom have died of consumption. Without very great care, I think he will not live to be an old man. I am not justified in giving my consent to your being a possible widow, and a certain nurse, for the greater part of your life. That is one reason. The other results from it. Either because of habitual

ill-health, or from a morbid disposition, your cousin has not the temper and forbearance that must be exercised by both husband and wife, if their home is to be a happy one. I think I need say no more. When you are twenty-one, if you cousin asks you again to be his wife, you may marry him if you please."

"No fear of that," said I.

"Certainly no fear of your being asked again by him—if I judge your cousin rightly. Mortified vanity will do a great deal towards reconciling him to your loss, and still more to prevent his ever proposing for you again. Now, I must go and break the sad news to dear mamma, who has by this time bought your wedding dress in imagination, and arranged the wedding breakfast; not that she wishes to part with her May-pole daughter, but she has a weak habit of desiring to make everybody happy. As Robert has persuaded her that you love him—and still more, that all the happiness of his life is bound up in you, she is desirous to make you both happy, at any cost to herself."

Mamma, whose mission on earth seemed to be that of consoler to all the world, was not so disappointed as papa expected. She said, "Poor fellow!" Shortly after, as if to herself, "True, 'tis a nurse he requires!" Then in a few minutes, in what she meant to be a whisper, she joyfully said to papa, "Miss Bates now! Miss Bates is just the very person."

"My dear, as nurse?" said papa, affecting to be astonished.

"No, no, as a wife!—his wife, I mean," whispers mamma louder than ever. And from that hour I believe that she set herself seriously to make the match.

After that battle with my evil temper up in the garret that day, I felt older, and tried to be better—it was, I think, the departure and putting away of childish things.

I tried to behave well to Miss Sturt, the governess, and to take all her harshness and severity pleasantly. She was a very clever person, if she was not agreeable, so instead of confining my intercourse with her to the time when I helped to teach the children, I asked her to walk out with me, begged her to teach me German, and frequently sat with her in the evening.

She was a grim woman, and that is the truth. Somebody must have behaved very ill to her, for she never gave any one, not even my mother, credit for a good motive.

"Ah!" said I, with a little indignation one day, when mamma had sent her a present of a reading-lamp, over which she disdainfully "humphed," "what pleasure you forego in not taking everything as it is meant."

"I take this as it is meant," said she; "your mamma is afraid I shall tire with so many in the schoolroom, and bribes me to stay."

"Then I shall take away your lamp—you don't deserve it."

"You will do nothing of the kind—the lamp will be useful to me:

while I remain here. In leaving it behind, I shall be able to express to your mother the right meaning of her gift."

"Then," said I, rashly, "as you so judge her, learn that she only keeps you here because no one else would have you."

I only intended to give her a hint as to the wisdom of being more courteous of speech. I was not prepared for the effect of my indiscretion. Miss Sturt went straight to mamma, and gave her what she called a "bit of her mind."

When she returned to the schoolroom, where I had remained trembling and repentant, she was in that state of satisfied ill-temper which results from the consciousness of having said all, and more than all, she had intended to say—the flush of victory was on her countenance. It is no doubt pleasant to blurt out without compunction whatever is in one's mind—but it has its inconveniences. Miss Sturt lighted the lamp in a fierce manner; she took up a book sternly and opened it, as if it was a naughty child about to be lectured.

The expression of her countenance changed gradually from sternness to sadness; her head drooped, she was no more reading her book than I was. I fancied I heard a sound like the splash of a tear on the page. What a large tear it must have been! It had been accumulating for a long period, probably, and could be kept back no longer. Impetuous as usual, I was about to start up and do all sorts of things. Mamma's gift of consoler and adviser seemed suddenly bestowed upon me. Luckily, warned by past experience, I sat still and considered for full five minutes. The result was exactly contrary to my first impulse. I threw down my book with a nonchalant air, said, "Good night, Miss Sturt," in a cold, off-hand manner, and left the room with apparent indifference.

I heartily desired to make Miss Sturt amends for my rude and inconsiderate speech, but I knew that if I asked her pardon she would only work herself up into a fresh fit of ill-humour; and if I tried to console her, she would only shut her heart more and more, take greater umbrage, do herself and her prospects a vast deal of harm, under the mistaken idea that she was only acting with the respect she owed to herself. In her present unusually softened state of feeling, I concluded that an assumption of anger on my part for her injustice to mamma would disarm her imagination, and leave her amenable to common sense.

But once out of her sight, I was very sorry indeed for all the pain I had caused and the mischief I had done. I ran down to mamma with a breaking heart—I felt that I deserved a scolding, and if she gave me one, it would be the first. It required a great deal of courage to open the door and to appear before her, for I dreaded her reproof, gentle as it would be.

And now think what a mother she was! She looked in my face and said nothing. She saw I was already punished. I tried to speak, but she said quietly,

"Wind this skein of wool for me, my dear."

Her voice always spoke to us of peace, love, and harmony. In a few minutes she said—

"Take care, dear, that the children are perfect in their lessons to-morrow. Miss Sturt talks of leaving us, and I believe your papa wishes it—he thinks her manner bad for the children. But she is a good governess and a clever woman, and I fancy the children will be more likely to take warning against her peculiar manner than to imitate it. At all events, if she says no more, I shall take no notice of her intimation. I can better put up with little scenes like that of to-day, than to think she is without a situation."

So nothing more was said, but I felt mamma's forbearance towards me, as well as towards Miss Sturt. The next day Miss Sturt was so mild and pleasant, that her two elder pupils opened their good-tempered black eyes in pleased surprise. Days passed on, so did weeks—matters fell into their usual course. Miss Sturt remained with us, but mamma secretly exerted herself to obtain for her a situation as matron to some national asylum, a position in every respect more suitable and congenial to her than the gregarious household in which she now dwelt.

As for myself, I was growing daily out of my childish ways of thought and action into womanhood. I became conscious of certain powers of mind which began now to open themselves as the petals of a flower unfold. I felt happy in the sense of improvement, in my powers of self-control and self-government; and, as part of the duty of wisdom, I cultivated a staid and, as I considered, a ladylike demeanour. Miss Sturt had no longer the power to irritate me into indiscreet speech; on the contrary, I adopted, with secret self-complacence, some of mamma's soothing manner. I looked back with contempt on my former desire to be thought pretty. My present aspiration was to be thought wise.

I of course confided to Marblette by letter this change in my views, with many Spartan resolutions as to my future course of life. Marblette promptly answered my letter. She highly approved of my idea. At the same time, she could not go so far as I had in desiring an attack of small-pox to show my indifference to beauty, and to suffer nothing to interfere with my determination to be wise.

She was not, she added, quite sure about my P.S.—(it had contained a commission about patterns of materials for dresses, also the newest fashion of making them). She thought, that, for a person so utterly indifferent about good looks, a sober brown stuff gown, bought in Newcastle, would be sufficient. She finally charged me not to run wilfully in the way of small-pox, as the holidays were approaching, and, though I might be willing to sacrifice myself to my new principles, she had not arrived at this pitch of fortitude.

Marblette's letter made me laugh, and also made me think. I began (unconscious that I was so clever) to philosophise.

"This world," thought I, "is made of strange contradictions. Each is made to work against the other, and to bring out the merits of both. For instance, mamma's soft, sweet philanthropy is gradually melting through the crust of Miss Sturt's moroseness. Papa thinks mamma too yielding, and, therefore, exerts himself to get that nomination to the Matronship of the — Institution. If she obtains it, the situation will be so pleasant for Miss Sturt, that perhaps she will become amiable. Then again, there is grandmamma, who has always worried herself so much about minutes and rules, that now she has made herself ill; but it has made Sissy value time so much that she thinks every moment wasted that is not spent according to rule, in spite of Philip Carne. I wonder if Philip Carne likes that," was my next speculation; "I suppose he does. Should I be like Sissy if I were in love and engaged?"

I did not know. My character was certainly improving, and now, I thought, was the time to give it a good bias. I resolved to set up a model in my heart, and rule myself by it. The person I most desired to resemble was papa. He was wise, yet not too wise to be full of fun. He was good-tempered, but inflexible; he was just, yet full of mercy. He was a sincere Christian, yet wholly unbogoted. Every day people came to consult him on all sorts of subjects. Nobody had ever yet consulted me upon any subject, and, I was obliged to own, they showed their wisdom in so refraining. Grandmamma's system of education had been good for the formation of habits, but it was wholly deficient as regarded the schooling of the mind. We were not allowed time to think or consider; nothing was expected of us but implicit obedience. This was a good foundation, for our minds were gaining strength. But now that we were called upon to think for ourselves, our activity was irregular, and we were at a loss what to decide for the best. Nevertheless, good seed had been sown, and the growth was rapid.

In the midst of my good resolutions the news came that grandmamma had quite recovered her health; that she and Sissy were on their return to England, and were coming to visit us; and they would call for Marblette as they passed through London, and bring her with them. This joyful news put all thoughts about myself out of my head. I could only think of the dear ones so soon to be with us once more. They came at last, and for days Marblette, Sissy, and I, did nothing but laugh and talk, and congratulate each other.

After a few days we were so far sobered down that I found time to ask Marblette if she had any particular opinions on or about matrimony.

"Well," answers Marblette, puckering up her little face with a comical look, "I have. And my first opinion is, that I have a right to be very angry at not having been taken into the confidence of a great overgrown thing like you."

"Oh! Marblette, how did you hear? Would it have been honourable of me to tell you?"



"Honourable or not, I heard of it, and was disgusted."

"But who told you?"

"Well—*he* did."

"Robert!"

"Yes. Do you wish to know how it came to pass?"

"Very much."

"It occurred in this wise. I was very busy one day at my lessons, endeavouring to addle my brains over quadratic equations" (Marblette loved to fling her learning at my ignorant head), "when Mrs. Marchmont marched in, and said that my cousin Robert was in the drawing-room, and had brought news of the family, and that I might have an interview of one quarter of an hour. So off I went, and was rather touched by his excessive delight at seeing me. He dashed into the matter after this fashion: 'I do not know if you have heard that I wished to transport Dudu to my pretty Rectory, and install her there as my wife. She could not, however, make up her mind to become a clergyman's wife, and refused me. Now, with two such lovely cousins, 'tis impossible to seek for a wife elsewhere, if I can obtain one of them. So, my dearest Marblette, feeling sure you will not think the less of me for having first made my offer to your sister, I come to you, and heartily tender you my love, my heart, everything I possess. I hope you do not think you are unfitted for a clergyman's wife?' I answered, No—I thought I was very well fitted for that sort of thing, and fancied I should like it, but I was sorry that I could not be so as his wife. Whereupon he exclaimed that he had not the least intention of requiring a positive answer from me then—I was so very young. All he at present desired was to tell me his own hopes and wishes, and to ask to be allowed, from time to time, an opportunity of showing how deeply he loved me—and so forth."

"Dear Marblette, that is just what he said to me. How did you get out of it?"

"I put on a very severe look, just like this" (and she made a sort of face like Titania's when angry with Oberon, immensely pretty and dignified), "and said, 'I hope that at no age I shall be deterred speaking my mind. You must take this answer now or not at all. I never would, should, or could, marry you.' 'What reason,' said he, 'could I, a mere child, have for such a peremptory rejection?' Well, Dudu, I could not very well say outright that I thought him a prig, and very like Mr. Collins in 'Pride and Prejudice,' so I answered, 'A gentleman would perceive at once whether his suit were disagreeable, but as he was my cousin I forgave him for having put me to the pain of saying that I would rather not marry at all than marry him?'"

"How nice and firm of you, Marblette! What did he say then?"

"I am sure I do not know, for I went out of the room, and I have never seen him since."

"You know he is going to marry Miss Bates?"

"Is he? Then I don't envy Miss Bates."

"Mamma thinks they will be happy. Miss Bates is a good deal older than he is, and she seems to like him."

"I hope so, for the sake of both."

"And so, Marblette, it never struck you, as it did me, about the name."

"No, nothing struck me but his want of proper respect to me, coming in that clandestine way, to me, a school girl, to entrap me into a promise; pretending that he was in love with me. I am very young, but I think I can tell when I am really loved, and when I am not."

Marblette looked quite a little heroine as she spoke.

"It seems to me," said I, "that it would only be a proper thing for us to settle what sort of man we will marry, and the sort of man whom we will not. It is so awkward to be taken by surprise. I nearly said Yes to Robert, because I did not know how to say No."

"You may be sure I should have forbidden the banns; but, for fear of anything dreadful, we will do as you say. First of all, I should like to marry a rich man."

"I don't think I care about riches. It would be so nice to be poor, and to work hard for the person you loved."

"Very well; now you see I have settled to marry a rich man, and you a poor one. What is the next thing?"

"Of course, good as gold."

"And of a good family."

"Old as the hills."

"And very gentlemanlike."

"Perfectly refined."

"Clever."

"He must be excessively talented, so that we may look up to him."

"Tall."

"Fair."

"Blue eyes."

"An aquiline nose."

"And a pretty name."

"Of course a pretty name. I always pity Mrs. Hogg so much."

"Dreadful! Brown and Green are bad enough."

"And Johnsons, and Thomsons, and Jacksons."

"And Steels, and Stones and Stermes."

"Oh! They are odious! But we must also have a pretty Christian name."

"Yes. I like Constantine."

"And I like Marmaduke."

"Scotch names are rather pretty."

"No! Think of Andrew."

"Peter is much worse."

"Oh! Peter is dreadful."

"After all, I think it will be better not to marry at all, there is so much to be considered."

"I agree with you; we won't."

"That being settled, let us go to sleep now."

Which we did, this interesting conversation having taken place when we were in bed.

Before the holidays were over, our cousin was married to Miss Bates. We called upon the bride, and called her cousin with great cordiality. Robert gravely told us both, in private, that though not so handsome as some persons he could name, she was an inestimable woman.

Nothing worth relating occurred for some time.

When I was nearly eighteen it was decreed that Marblette should leave school, and that we should both "come out" together.

But before the end of the last half year there occurred an event in my life. An invitation to dinner came to my father and mother from the great people in our neighbourhood. Sissy was asked too; and there was an immediate fuss at once made about her dress. Mamma always wore black velvet, and a little turban of scarlet and gold muslin. Sissy's dress was ordered from London.

But only two days before the dinner party, Sissy was taken ill with a feverish cold.

We doctored her immensely. She had hot baths, white wine whey, hot flannels, and lots of gruel. But nothing would do, she grew worse and worse, and, either from the violence of her cold, or the severity of our remedies, became quite low-spirited, and said she would really rather not go to the dinner-party at all.

We were greatly alarmed at such apathy—her new dress considered, too. But I did not know how to feel when it was decided that it would never do for papa and mamma to go without a daughter when a daughter was expected, and that I must take her place.

"You must wear my dress," whispered Sissy, hoarse from sore throat.

She was the most unselfish of mortals. It was a question if I could get into the dress. Fortunately I was very slender, and the body fitted tolerably; but I was very tall, and the dress was very short, and there was nothing to let down.

"Never mind," said mamma, "it cannot be helped, because you have no dinner-dress of your own. You must stoop, child, when any one looks at you, which, I daresay, in such a grand party, will be very seldom."

I do not know what young ladies of the present day would say at not being possessors of a dinner-dress at eighteen years of age, but such was my case. Grandmamma's maid dressed my hair. She boasted that she had made it up into nine bows. I felt there was some tremendous structure on my head, and that out of the number of hair pins used to build it up, half of them, at least, were running

into my head ; but I was not allowed to remonstrate, much less touch them.

"Pride must bear pain, Miss Dudu," remarked nurse.

I went to show myself to Sissy when dressed, who was well enough to feel a great deal of interest in my appearance also. All the household came to look at me, and I practised stooping to the proper point. Finally, we drove off, and on the way I took advantage of the dark to remove some of the obnoxious pins. Fortunately my hair curled naturally, so that though I could not boast of nine bows when I arrived, my hair did not look very untidy.

It was only when I got into the room that I felt nervous, and trembled. A lady sitting behind me asked if I was cold. In the meekest of little voices I answered "No," and trembled more than ever. But we went into dinner, and I had to go with a very tall gentleman, and, of course, in my confusion I forgot about stooping, and all the world might see how short my dress was.

I was placed near the bottom of the table, near Lord Oram ; he called me to come and sit by him, with the gentleman who had taken me in. When I could look up I saw that my lord was an elderly, white-haired man, very pleasant in his manners. I soon grew sufficiently confidential to inform him that this was my first dinner-party, and several other things, more candid than entertaining, I have no doubt.

The gentleman who had taken me in to dinner sat on my left hand, but as yet I had not dared to look at him. He had listened to what I had been saying to my other neighbour, for he told me that, if I would come to see him some day, he would lend me his favourite horse to ride.

I looked at him for one second, just to see if he was joking, and I saw a very nice face, fair, an aquiline nose, a beautiful smile, with teeth like a row of almonds.

"I shall ask your father and mother to come also," said he, as if answering my sudden look.

"Thank you," I said ; "thank you very much."

"Hullo !" said Lord Oram, "what a fervent 'thank you !' What have you been saying to my little neighbour, Peter ?"

"Peter !" it was of no use trying to stop myself. "Peter !" I repeated, and looked up into that handsome face.

"Yes, Peter !" he answered, smiling more than ever. "Do you dislike the name ?"

"Yes, I did—but I don't think I shall now."

"Now, it is my turn to say 'thank you !'"

I laughed and said—

"After all, one cares very little whether a name be pretty or ugly, if the person is nice."

"I am glad you think so," he answered, and his eyes looked straight into mine.

The look went down into my heart, and opened a spring there.

## CHAPTER XI.

## THE LEAP FROM CHILDHOOD.



OUR father and mother possessed one carriage. The circular vehicle, formerly mentioned, of course was not under their control; we alone ordered it out, harnessed the horses, arranged the footman, and settled who should go inside. It belonged to us children, and we used it according to our own caprices; and there was nobody to remonstrate as to probable damage, loss of paint, the effects of over-loading, and the wear and tear of the wheels, through the daily running away of the horses. I must own we were short-sighted with regard to the work we gave our family coach. We never thought of the future; consequently, even in my day, long before I could afford to miss it, the "family coach" gave up the ghost.

In a famous run-away, during which the horses took us over the onion-beds, through the potato-rows, knocking over sea-kail pots—one wheel came off; it was repaired with the utmost dispatch. But this was only the beginning of many chronic ailments. The other wheel lost some of its spokes; and the first wheel altogether collapsed, necessitating a new one—that is, it was new to us, but had done a deal of service elsewhere, and, moreover, was a trifle larger than it ought to have been, so that the "family coach" took very much to going on the incline.

At last the whole concern became so tottering, the horses were forbidden to run away, and no child above five years old was allowed to sit in it, and then not more than two at a time. Finally, it gave way in its interior economy; and, being pronounced incurable—or, in other words, not worth the mending—we mournfully saw its sad remains used for lighting the nursery fire.

But the carriage that belonged to our father and mother was very differently treated. They called it a "charret," now-a-days chariot. It lived in a large coach-house, carefully covered up with brown Holland, having such a strange look when thus enveloped, that one of our little sisters asked "if our ghostly enemy was inside," which shocked us greatly. It was very seldom used, but when this was the case, it was not brought out at once, as was the custom with our coach, but it was wheeled out into the yard the day before. Its ghostly covering was taken off, the windows and doors were opened, the whole of it dusted inside and out. In short, it had a regular airing, and we always stood and admired it greatly, firmly believing that no other people possessed such a carriage. No more they did, for it was painted a creamy-buff colour. Our mother, disliking yellow, which was the fashionable colour, compromised between gentility and taste, and had it painted buff. When contrasted with other carriages, it

seemed to me that ours had come from the coach-makers too soon, and that they had omitted its last coat of paint.

But whatever its appearance, it was treated with the respect due to a treasure not to be replaced. In buying that carriage for their wedding tour, my father and mother felt pretty certain it would be their first and last purchase in the carriage line. Why I mention the carriage at all, arises from the fact that within its narrow bounds my thoughts leaped out of childhood into the first overwhelming flood of a maiden's fancies.

We had gone to this my first dinner-party in the buff-coloured chariot. Going there, I had been rather unhappy, sitting bodkin between my parents. Not that that position made me unhappy, for not only had I never experienced any other in a carriage, but I was conscious I was an object of envy to all my sisters, seated in it. But I was unhappy because my hair was so be-pinned, because I was shy—because I was sorry for Sissy—because—and because. They were easily multiplied; a general sense of infelicity culminated into a doleful melancholy. I was sorry for John Gubbins, the post-boy, of whom I had a perfect view, as he bobbed up and down like a machine on his horse, for it rained heavily. And ever and anon, as he turned a sort of severe admonitory look on the other horse, to see if it was doing its proper share of the work, I saw by the carriage-lamps that the rain ran off his cap-peak as if he had a spout there just over his nose. I was sorry, too, for the horses, who drooped their ears, and often shook them, as if solemnly protesting against the heartlessness of people going out to dinner on a rainy night.

And now the dinner was over, the whole evening was gone, and once more we were in the buff chariot. On our return home, mamma, in coming, had squeezed herself into nothing, not to crush my dress. Now she either forgot, or thought it of no further consequence. Papa, tired, lay back, with that faculty which men have of sitting with their knees much apart. Consequently, the amount of room on which I had to sit was almost mythical, and thereby uncomfortable. It rained harder than ever; the horses looked more and more disconsolate and upbraiding; John Gubbins' cap was a complete water-spout all round.

But I was no longer melancholy. I laughed to myself—a dark shadow across the window made me see myself broadly smiling. So far from pitying Sissy, I caught myself thinking “how lucky she was ill!” My better nature reproached me for a moment, reproving me severely for such a wicked thought. I must pity her—dear Sissy! what had she not lost? She would have sat by Pe—I mean he who was called Peter. What was his other name? Marblette must be told as soon as possible that Peter was, after all, a very good name—a saint's name; and that it had been very wrong of us to despise it. Should I tell her that I knew a Peter, and that he was by no means what we had thought a Peter would be? On the contrary, he was a

Peter—but, oh ! how silly of me to have pulled the pins out of my hair. All the other ladies had bows upon bows. I alone had curls. If I had only known whom I was to meet, I would have borne the pins, however painful.

After dinner, when the gentlemen came into the drawing-room, I saw him—he who is called Peter—look all round the room ; then, suddenly seeing me, his whole face brightened, and he came and sat down by me. As I made this confession to myself in the buff chariot—papa sound asleep on one side, and mamma cogitating on the other—I was quite bewildered with the tingling sensations of delight and vanity. I told myself I was silly, and myself laughed with pleasure. I tried to recall of what we had been discoursing. He began by saying he lived a long way off—one hundred and seventy-two miles—two long days' journey. Did I think that too far ?

"Oh ! no—we often went into Gloucestershire."

"Did I like travelling ?"

I should think I did !—not that I answered him in that abrupt manner. I said "Very much," with quite as much ease and composure as Sissy could have done—at least I thought so. But I suppose there was more expression in my manner, because he said :

"Ah ! I see nothing would daunt you. You would like to go to the world's end."

"To Jerusalem," I answered, blushing.

"Is that your ambition ? Let us make a party, and go there—you and I, your father and mother."

"Papa could not go, because he may not leave his parish so long, and mamma would not care to go."

"But you have brothers and sisters."

"Yes—one brother and nine sisters."

"Nine what ?"

"Nine sisters."

"Impossible !"

I wonder why he that is called Peter should be so astonished, not to say confused, at hearing I had nine sisters. We were all of us very proud of being so many ; and mamma has been heard to say she would like to have nineteen daughters. Evidently Mr. Peter was incapable of grasping the idea that having nine sisters was a felicitous state of things. After a while, he asked if they were all like me—a question that made me laugh heartily.

"I will describe two," I answered, "and you shall judge for yourself."

He owned that being "prim" was not what he should venture to say of me, even though he had only known me for one short evening. But it was all very well describing so pretty a Marblette. There were different sorts of beauty.

"True," I began eagerly ; "once ——"

Then, like a prancing steed suddenly reined up, I stopped, abruptly.

Absolutely was I so far forgetting my position as Sissy's representative, clothed in her very garment, and yet about to tell an almost stranger that little episode of—"what two pretty girls!"

Though he absolutely implored me, I would say no more—why would I not go on with that "once?"

"Because I could only do so at the expense of his good opinion."

"How did I know that? Perhaps it would be just the other way."

"I could not venture to hope so."

"Are you naturally a vain person?"

"I fear I am—but Marblette is wholly without vanity."

"I own to liking a little vanity. Vain people are generally sweet-tempered and unselfish."

"One may be both without being vain,"

"I think now you are a little prim."

"You seem amusing yourselves very well here in this corner," interrupted Lord Oram; "may one ask with diffidence the subject of so much grave description?"

"We are arranging a party to Jerusalem."

"You don't say so!—how many are going?"

"At present, ten sisters, one brother, and your humble servant."

"Then I shall not join you. Among so many petticoats there are sure to be quarrels."

"But you never quarrel—do you?"

I shook my head. In fact, we ten sisters quarrelled very often.

"She is very frank, Peter. Come, what say you to giving up the Jerusalem party—and joining mine to the glass-works? That is not so far. Indeed, if we quarrel, we have only to separate and go home."

"I will join my Lord's party, if you will."

"I must ask leave."

"Dutiful daughter. Dutiful daughters make good wives—hey, Peter?"

From this I conclude that he who is called Peter is not married. Yet he must be thirty years old. Twelve years older than I am. Though I felt myself colour all over at the suggestion, I could not help thinking (in the obscurity of the buff chariot) that the difference of twelve years between man and wife was not only a very slight difference, but just the proper difference. I wish he had been the one who saw Marblette and me in the deep rivuleted Gloucester lane. I recalled the wonderful smile that lighted up his face when he saw me in the corner, and I came to the conclusion that the wife of him who is called Peter must die when he died. To have lived in the sunshine of that smile, and then to be expected to live without it—a dreadful sigh escaped me involuntarily.

"My dear!" exclaimed mamma, aroused from her cogitations.

"Are we at home?" asked papa, awakened by her voice.

"No, we have still another mile, but I am afraid Dudu is not well."



"Oh yes, mamma. I was only thinking, mamma, what is the name of that gentleman."

"He who took you in to dinner, and sat good-naturedly chatting to you afterwards, and was your partner at Pope Joan—Mr. Mallerdean."

"And a very nice fellow he is," said papa.

"Oh no, not at all, quite the contrary—he is a Whig," answered mamma.

(A Whig! What wickedness possessed me I know not, but I liked him for that.)

"Whig or not," said papa, "I say again he is a very superior, intelligent fellow."

"Ah!" sighed mamma, "it is a sad thing that he should be just what you say, and yet all these virtues become vices from his dreadful principles."

"Well, my dear, you must forget his wickedness, and think only of his virtues. He comes to the Rectory to-morrow, on his way to see the glass-works."

"I am very sorry to hear it—it always makes me melancholy to dislike people, when I wish to be civil to them."

"You must hand him over to Dudu, then. She seemed to forget his Whiggism when chatting with him."

"I was pleased with his good-nature to the child."

"And Lord Oram was equally so. I wish his Lordship would leave off that bad habit of swearing."

"Is 'Damn me' swearing, papa?" I asked innocently.

"My dear child!" exclaimed mamma, amazed into a sort of an attempt at anger.

"It is rather like it, Dudu, so don't let the phrase slip so glibly off your tongue again. It is astonishing how these kind of expressions lurk in the mouth, ready to pop out the moment it is opened. They are like little demons, always on the watch for mischief. Well! I am very sleepy," continued papa, "but still I have spent a very pleasant evening, and none the less so because a certain young lady comported herself very much to my liking."

"Thank you, papa," I answered fervently.

"Pretty faces are, I know, very attractive—but a sensible person like Mr. Mallerdean—"

"I beg your pardon, love," interrupted mamma, "but he is not sensible—that is his only fault. His remarks on Mr. Pitt's War Bill horrified me."

"Poor mamma," said papa, compassionately, "will you forgive me for saying I was much edified by what he said."

Mamma was at this remark thoroughly roused from her cogitations, and proceeded to explain to papa her views on the matter. Being a little in her way, she gradually pushed me, in the heat of her arguments, off the little bit of seat I already possessed. Papa saved me from slipping down to the bottom of the buff chariot.

"Come, you have unseated Dudu, which must content you, for it is not in your power to unseat Mr. Mallerdean."

"I wish I could—I wish I could," murmured that gentlest mamma. But we were now at home, and I had not half satisfied my heart with recalling the happiness of the evening. My feelings in going there were as opposite to those on returning as Whigs and Tories. Yet I felt both were true. In too good discipline to dawdle over the preparation for bed—unable to sit, like the heroines of the present day, with my toes on the fender, pretending to brush my hair, for the simple reason that I had no fire, I had no time to begin thinking it all over again. And when once in bed, the inveterate habit of going to sleep immediately overcame me.

Moreover, owing to the unwonted excitement, I was very, very late in the morning. To miss prayers was a crime of such astonishing magnitude, it had never yet been committed in our house. So that for the first few minutes, though conscious of a crisis in my inner life, I thought of nothing but dressing; but this dawning of other things made my fingers tremulous, and sent my wits astray. Suddenly I remembered Sissy, and that it was my duty to think of her before any one. This calmed me—there was nothing in the matter of Sissy that could make my heart beat, or thrill me with a trembling fear.

As I knelt at my private prayers by the door of my room, ere I opened it and crossed the threshold to begin the duties of a new day, I sent a childlike petition to my Father in Heaven that He would love me this day, and guard me. Then I went to Sissy. I had but time to hear she had slept well all night, and was wonderfully better, before the prayer-bell rang.

Breakfast over, I found that mamma had already told Sissy all the news of the previous evening, and that, inspired by it all, and alive to the unwonted privilege of seeing great people, Sissy was going to rise and come down to the drawing-room.

Then were we very busy, for, particular as mamma was at all times in the adornment and arrangements of her house, she was not satisfied without making them still better to receive Lady Oram.

Even the baby was excited, and said—

"Put on me's petty fock, for a duce is toming," meaning a duke, for the nursery believed nothing less was to lunch with us to-day.

Grandmamma alone remained unmoved.

In the midst of our preparations I bethought me of my intended letter to Marblette. In those days each letter to her cost elevenpence. I had so far cooled down from the excitement to which the buff chariot was alone privy, that I thought it a good deal of money to spend in merely telling her that I had changed my opinion with regard to the name of Peter. I hastily counted my money, as I ran to tell our man-servant that luncheon was to be punctually at one o'clock. I had nineteen shillings, a sixpence, and a new silver twopence that always lived in my purse.

Advised by nurse, we generally adopted the plan of keeping a silver penny or twopence in our purses, that we might always say with truth that we had silver in our pockets; she thought it "genteel," she said, so we did it as well as we could. I own that sometimes I have been reduced to such a state of ungentility as to have nothing in my purse. The fear of this disgrace made me pause about spending elevenpence on a letter to Marblette out of its proper turn; for two months had yet to run ere I could hope for more money. I generally wrote to Marblette once a month. The last letter had been gone ten days. I compromised the matter by promising to begin my letter this day, and to write a little bit every day.

Like all expectant and enthusiastic young things, I experienced a disappointment. When the party arrived, so far from being the lively, amusing, friendly "Peter" of the evening before, Mr. Mallerdean was cold—almost haughty. He scarcely looked at me, and only bowed to my father and mother, whereas everybody else shook hands with them, and with me.

I do not know that I felt so grieved as astonished at his cold repellant manner on this day, which was as much as to say—"You are strangers to me, and I intended you to be strangers." But I think the assumption of coldness was not natural. He began gradually to relax.

Papa paid little attention to him, as he was talking to Lady Oram; mamma did not seem to know he was in the room; grandmamma was interchanging old-fashioned courtesies with Lord Oram; and Sissy, reclining on a sofa, looking delicate and pretty, with a little mob cap over her smooth hair, and a lace shawl of mamma's, had her back towards him. Two little sisters, whose black eyes danced with delight at the sight of so much company, sat near him.

At first I saw his keen eyes noting the whole family. They rested long on that beautiful and stately specimen of old age, grandmamma. Then he examined the room, which was a lofty, handsome room, arranged with great taste by mamma, and exquisitely clean and fresh. He took up the books on the table, and finally, almost like the Peter of last night, he began to talk to the two little girls. He asked their names.

"Miss Emily and Miss Effie."

"Oh! I must not presume to call you Emily and Effie?"

"Certainly not. Nurse says all gentlemen must call us Miss."

"Then, Miss Emily and Miss Effie, are you going to honour us with your company to the glass-works?"

"No, we are not, we are sorry. Dudu asked for us to go, but we are not to go."

"Who is Dudu?"

"That big girl there—Miss Dudu, if you please, sir."

"I beg her pardon—Miss Dudu—I know her, she dined with us last night."

"Yes, she did—she went instead of Sissy, who was ill, and she wore Sissy's new best frock."

"Did she?—well, it became her very much—she looked very nice in it."

"So we thought. Some of these days, when we are bigger, we hope Sissy will lend it to us."

"I daresay you will look equally pretty in it, as did Miss Dudu. What an odd name!"

"It isn't her real name, it is one we gave her in the nursery, because she is always ready to do anything for everybody."

"Then I suppose you love her very much?"

"Yes, we love her just the same as the others; only Marblette is everybody's favourite. Oh! that's the bell for luncheon; now we must go, and we shall not see you any more, sir, so good-bye."

"I sincerely hope I shall see Miss Emily and Miss Effie again—good-bye for the present."

"Good-bye, sir. There is cherry tart for luncheon."

This was confided to him in a half whisper, and made him smile.

As for me, I neither felt angry, nor sorry, nor discomposed. A quiet serenity took possession of me. I felt that Fate had me in her hands, and she should do with me what she pleased. Only an instinct prompted me to be at ease, and regard him no more. I began to feel I was wise not to waste elevenpence to tell Marblette that Peter was a good name.

As we were going through the glass-works, I became conscious that he tried now and then to resume the terms on which we had parted the evening before. After one of these attempts, I had drawn a little aside, deeply thinking what he could mean. When I looked up, he was intently watching me. I felt myself turn pale rather than red.

"You seem to know everyone here," he said to me, shortly after.

"Oh! yes, we are often here; and our nurse's brother is the foreman, and is very kind to us. Sometimes he permits us to blow some glass for ourselves, and we engrave it very often."

"You must engrave some to-day, miss," said the foreman, who was standing nearer to us than I thought, "that the gentleman may see what a good hand you make of it."

He went for some specimens, and while he was absent, Mr. Mallerdean said to me,

"Your father is the first parish priest I have ever seen who seems to consider that his parishioners are really his children. It is a pleasure to watch their faces as he approaches them, and I observe he has a word for each."

I mention this speech more to mark the difference now to what it was then. The exception, we may thank God, is at present the other way.

And that is not the only good for which this generation has to be

grateful. Let them contrast their childhood with ours, and mark the difference.

On the return of the foreman, I removed my bonnet, and tucking my hair behind my ears, I took a glass tumbler, and, turning the wheel, proceeded to engrave a bunch of forget-me-nots, with some wheat-ears, the easiest of all the patterns that I knew. Tying these together with an imaginary knot of ribbon, I traced along its margin the name "Peter," in the most minute characters I could accomplish. While those around me praised my skill, but few examined it sufficiently close to detect the letters. Mr. Mallerdean himself did not appear to do so, when suddenly he asked to buy the tumbler. It was offered for his acceptance; he took it with thanks, but I saw him give the foreman some money surreptitiously. Presently he said to me—

"Thank you for immortalising my name."

"It was a piece of mischief on my part," I answered, composedly; "for you cannot call it a pretty name."

"Yet you told me last night you would like it henceforth."

To this I made no reply.

When he left, Mr. Mallerdean shook hands with the whole family.

## CHAPTER XII.

### THE USE OF GRANDMAMMAS.

**T**HAT night I wondered at the strange inconsistency of my thoughts. But twenty-four hours ago, how my heart bounded, my pulse beat, my cheeks glowed! This evening I was pale, listless, without energy of any kind.

"Mr. Mallerdean says you have Danish ears, Duda."

I started as if discovered in some guilty act. Was the name of "Peter" written on my face, that Sissy should mention Mr. Mallerdean apropos of nothing at all?

"In that he is right," answered papa; "I am as truly descended from the Danes as your mother from the Saxons. That is how it comes about that I have black-eyed, blue-eyed, fair-haired, dark-haired children; one or two being such funny little things as to have all these rows and rows of spun silk on their heads, and yet laugh at me out of great black eyes."

"And has me Dane's ears like Duda?" answered the little one apostrophised by papa.

"Let us see," answers papa. "I declare," pretending to search among the curls, "here is a little maiden with no ears! What a funny little maiden!"

Gravely the little maiden began to search herself—on the top of her

head, above her eyes, under her nose, the little busy fingers guided by papa's. The great black eyes began to grow bigger and rounder.

"If me has no ears, is me a brute?"

That was too much for papa.

"Ah, here they are!—very good ears. I think when you are as big as Dudu, they will not be quite so Danish as hers. You see all this fair wool on your head belongs to the Saxons, and so you have Saxon ears."

"Tut them off, papa, and give me Dane's ears."

I mention this little episode by way of acknowledging that, even among the youngest, there was a fair share of vanity in the family. As for me, that night I looked at my ears. 'Tis true, I had but a second to do it—our house was too well peopled to have more opportunity. After I had seen them, I remained ignorant of the cause of Mr. Mallerdean's remark, whether it was praise or blame.

The day I took Sissy's place at the great dinner was Tuesday; on Wednesday we went to the glass-works. On Thursday it was the day on which I went with papa to visit the colliers. That is, I taught some of the collier girls to sew, while papa went to visit the old and sick. These girls liked me; but they were rather too familiar to please me. Whig as I pretended to be, I liked being treated with respect. In those days poor people were more obsequious in their manners to those above them—except such wild people as these colliers.

"Miss," said one to me, almost before I had seated myself, "auld Lukie's deed."

"Is he indeed? How does Kattie bear it?"

Kattie was his wife—also very old. Indeed, so old did they both look, I had long wondered what ever kept them alive.

"She's greeting sair."

"Poor thing, she'll miss him greatly."

"It's no that, Miss—it's his lang coffin."

Here all the girls, regardless of me, began to laugh.

"Miles Carpenter winna mak his coffin for a pun. Auld Lukie was mickle abune sax foot, and noo he's streaked oot, he's langer nor iver; and Miles says he mun hae thrity shillin' for the coffin. And Kattie wonna gie it. She says they mun shorten him by the lugs."

Here the laughter was uncontrollable. I tried to restore order, and, by way of changing their thoughts, I told them, as if it was a story, that folks could be known by their ears. I generally told them some tale, but had felt quite unequal to the exertion that day. Papa had given us a dissertation upon ears that morning, so I retailed it for their benefit; and they forgot old Kattie, and her odd sort of grief, in trying to define each other's "lugs," as they called them.

"Papa," I asked, on our return home, "does old age deaden the feelings?" and I related to him Kattie's sorrow.

"I have been to see Kattie," said papa; "and I must say she is very

much more concerned about the expense of her husband's coffin than she is about his death. Whether to conclude that old age has subdued all feeling in her but that which we are told is strongest, avarice—or that she thinks it useless to mourn, as she must so soon follow him, I can't say."

"Is it better to die young, papa," I asked, "than to live until you have lost interest or affection?"

"You remember the heathen story of the mother who prayed the gods to bless her sons with the choicest gift of Heaven, and they both died that hour. Thus they esteemed early death a boon. But would you, Dudu, forego running that race which promises an immortal crown, because the road is rugged and long? Old age has sins and weaknesses as well as youth."

"No, papa: but I should not like to live so long as to outlive all feeling."

As I said these words, I felt within me such a glow of intense sympathy with all and everything around me.

"Not Kattie!—oh! never, never!" I exclaimed, half aloud, as running up-stairs, after reaching home, I sat down alone to think over a wonderful piece of news that greeted us on our return.

Mr. Mallerdean had been to the Rectory: he was disappointed not to see papa. (Why did no one say, just in ever so careless a manner, that he had asked for me? They did not. As for asking—no, the question was as impossible to drag from my lips, as it was impossible for Kattie to make her husband shorter.) But that was not all. He brought a letter from Lady Oram, asking mamma to permit Sissy to come for change of air to her, for a few days, and to bring her sister Dudu with her.

"If we are to do Sissy good," said the kind letter, "we must let her have a companion whom she loves, so don't let one come without the other. And be not particular about many fine garments, as we shall be almost alone. A habit would be desirable, as my Lord has a mania, at present, for giving riding lessons."

What a delightful letter!

At first mamma was dubious. We were so little accustomed to go out.

"Indeed!" said grandmamma, stiffly.

"Not Sissy," hastened to say mamma, conscious that she had hurt grandmamma's feelings; "dear Sissy is a girl of whom we may be proud in any company. But Dudu——"

"My son praised her deportment on Tuesday," said grandmamma, now in the highest pinnacle of stateliness.

Poor mamma! She hastened to soothe over this second thorn in grandmamma's injured dignity.

"The child has no proper dresses—a habit! There is not a habit in the family."

"I have one," said grandmamma: "and as they are not expected until Saturday, some dresses can be made. Ring for Hind."

Hind, grandmamma's maid, arrived, and, in obedience to orders, brought down an old box that was curiously light.

Outside, grandmamma said, it was covered with pig skin, which was white ; inside it was lined with cedar. It originally came from China.

When opened, folded in many papers we discovered a sky-blue cloth riding-habit, ornamented here and there with silver cord, and all down the front with silver buttons.

"My wedding dress," said grandmamma, not without a little tremor in her voice. "Beneath you will find my every-day dress, which is also a habit, and which will, I think, do for the girls."

I do not think the young ladies whom I see riding in Rotten Row would care to put on their grandmamma's habit, and exhibit themselves in that costume. But I not only felt extremely delighted at the prospect of wearing it, but most grateful to grandmamma for her offer.

The "every-day" habit was dark in colour, and much braided with black braiding ; and here and there were little ornaments they called tags. I tried it on—it fitted wonderfully.

"There !" said grandmamma, sufficiently elated to forget her stateliness, "I could almost think it was myself grown young again. In my day fashionable people wore nothing but habits. You girls now require laces, muslins, and silks, with gloves of fine leather, and bordered handkerchiefs. I was content with a habit, and was very proud when my dear Mr. Courtenaye put round my neck a thick gold chain to wear with it. The whimsies of lace tippets, frills, and flounces round a girl's throat was unknown. I am not sure that it may not be a cleaner fashion, but the laundress is more beholden to the taste than those who have to pay her bills."

We were curious to know how grandmamma happened to have these habits with her. From Hind we learnt that she never went anywhere, for any length of time, without them. Within the box were the gloves she had worn on her wedding-day, the great gold chain, a fan, and—dear, sweet, romantic grandmamma!—the bunch of flowers with which grandpapa greeted her on her wedding morning. How I loved her for retaining thus the fresh feelings of youth.

"Ah ! grandmamma," I thought, "you have taught me that old age can feel. I love you the better for it, because—because you must remember what I now feel. To you, grandmamma, could I confide—even as I would confide in Marblette, even more, for would not she laugh at me?"

Too true ! I feared when one is stirred by a mighty irrepressible feeling, no doubt one does that which, to calm and still unawakened hearts, seems ridiculous. I had a dread of Marblette's laughter.

Grandmamma's little fit of stately anger had given way to an urbanity not usual in her. Hind had received orders to go into the town for patterns of muslins and stuffs ; also to bespeak the services of a mantua-maker, whom she was "to bring back in her hand," as grandmamma said,



Pleased as I was with all this fuss, I was a prey to the deepest anxiety. Would grandmamma order me handkerchiefs with borders? Those which I had had hitherto were cut from a piece of what was called "cloth" (Irish linen). Indeed it was only lately I had been promoted to new cloth, and not had my handkerchiefs made from the stores of old linen. But even this anxiety was not so great as the fear lest I should not be allowed a pair of silk stockings.

Happily, all these anxieties gave place to unbounded content. I was provided with an India muslin frock for the evenings, to which bows and sashes, both blue and pink, were added, that I might change them on alternate evenings; also ribbons of the same colour for my hair. And I heard, with the highest gratification, that grandmamma thought Sissy might fasten a few real roses in my hair. Mamma lent me her coral necklace and bracelets; the only ornament I possessed of my own was an antique pearl brooch, whose centre was composed of a spray of hair artistically disposed, that did not interest me in the least, for I did not know whose hair it was. My two great anxieties fled before a liberal supply of the desired articles—all my own, and marked with my own name! For morning wear I had a dress of gauze—"Italian net," as it was then called—stone colour, barred with blue. Mamma also gave us each a very pretty riding habit.

Grandmamma seemed concerned that I had no other ornaments than coral ones. After a few minutes' thought, she sent once more for the Chinese box. Taking something out of it, she drew me to her, and said, whisperingly, while she placed a little parcel in my pocket

"Wear that, my child, the first time I ever saw it was the happiest day of my life. May it prove a charm to you, my pretty Dudu!"

How much was I affected when I discovered it was grandmamma's thick gold chain that she had worn on her wedding-day! Thinking it was her wish, I did not open the parcel until I was in the carriage, going to pay our visit. What a fine heart had grandmamma, so sympathising, so tender—so sweetly romantic! She had not outlived the cherished feelings of youth. Even had she been in Kattie's sphere of life, I felt sure she would have mourned her husband dead, and not his length after he was dead.

I kissed the gold chain tenderly, and vowed to myself that, if I lived to be a hundred, I would endeavour to be like grandmamma, tender and sympathising to the young and ignorant. Many thoughts crowded into my brain, making a vast confusion there. Luckily Sissy took the opportunity of imparting a few "oughts." She was innocently glad that I was pronounced worthy to wear grandmamma's thick gold chain. I must be sure to remember to wear it worthily. I "ought" to be like grandmamma; I "ought" to think before I spoke; I "ought" to walk, and not run; and if possible I must cure myself of the habit of violently blushing, which, Sissy was sorry to see, had increased very much of late. Oh! Sissy, Sissy!—all the time you were "oughting" me, you don't know what a racket was going on in

my brain ! How the world seemed all in a blazing sunshine ! how all the trees appeared to laugh with every leaf ! how the grass looked more verdant than I had ever seen ! People seemed happier !

The buff chariot had quite a handsome appearance ; John Gubbins rode his horse in an elated manner, and the old posters attempted to prance, pricking their ears, and going along as if it was quite a pleasure to be drawing us.

Lady Oram and Mr. Mallerdean were waiting for us at the lodge gate. Sissy was to go on in the buff chariot, because of her cold. When she arrived, she was to lie down, and order for herself a cup of tea. I was to walk through the grounds with Lady Oram and Mr. Mallerdean.

With grandmamma's gold chain in my pocket for a talisman, it was one of the pleasantest walks I ever had. Not that Mr. Mallerdean said much. The conversation was almost wholly carried on between Lady Oram and myself. She soon put me at my ease ; and, as she seemed really anxious to know all about us, I gave her all the information she wished.

"Your home seems to have been about the happiest I ever heard of," said she, smiling.

"Is not everybody's the same while young ?" I answered.

"I think not. It is not always that children have such good parents as yours."

"That is true—they always think of their children before themselves."

"And yet they do not spoil you."

"That would not be right. We are their charge—that is what papa says when he has to reprove us."

"Is that often ?"

"Oh, yes !—as is the case in all families, I suppose. We acknowledge to being a very happy family—but we do not imagine we deserve to be happier than others. God is very kind to us."

"You would regret leaving your home ?"

"I do not grieve for that which will not happen. Why should we leave home ?"

"I was thinking you might marry. Sissy is engaged to be married—is she not ?"

"Oh ! yes, but she is in love. She has been in love always—as long as I can remember. Neither is she going to leave home. When she marries, she is to live with our grandmother."

"And you have not been in love ?"

I looked up in her face. I could not help glancing at Mr. Mallerdean, too, who had his eyes fixed on me. I did not feel any embarrassment, as I answered, after a minute :

"I am much younger than Sissy."

"But you acknowledge she has been in love from a child."

"I am altogether different from Sissy."

"Have you never thought of marrying and leaving this happy home?"

"Yes, I have had to think of marrying a little. Marblette and I were obliged to do so. We settled whom we should like to marry, but we also settled we would rather not marry at all."

"What brought you to that conclusion?"

"Because we fancied we should require the people we were to marry to possess many qualities of a particular kind."

"A pretty name, for instance!" observed Mr. Mallerdean, calmly.

I looked at him, and reddened. There was a soft luminous light in his eyes as he returned my look, that made me look away, but I answered, sedately—

"Our talk was the talk of children. I fancy when people really love, it is like one's love for God—it becomes the religion of the heart, as the love of God is that for the soul."

"Very well answered," said Lady Oram. "When her time comes for loving you will see that she understands the feeling, Mr. Mallerdean. I did not mean to put you so much to the blush about it, Dudu, but, in truth, when I see a married couple make their home so like an earthly Paradise as do your father and mother, I always am anxious their children should marry, and carry away with them the seeds necessary to enrich other gardens. Wickedness, we are told, is sown broadcast over the world. I am ambitious of counteracting its seeds, and spreading widely those of happy contentment and simple virtues. Methinks there is something very bewitching in an artless, ingenuous mind."

"Very," answered Mr. Mallerdean. "The only question is whether the simplicity lasts long enough to prove its purity; and, in settling that question, whether it may not last too long to be altogether desirable."

"In other words, you think there is a very narrow distinction between simplicity and stupidity. You would wish a person to be truthful and natural—yet intelligent, not to say clever?"

"I own to being of Solomon's mind as regards fools—and you will find his opinion is a very prevalent opinion. Stupidity and folly are more despised—I may say abhorred—than sins of a very black dye."

"Provided the person who commits these sins is courageous and undaunted."

That was my answer, and I could not help saying it. I had felt a little conscious that they were half alluding to me, or my family, in what they said of simplicity and artlessness; so I felt a vast wish to prove, however simple I might be, I yet had my opinions as well as Solomon.

He smiled, and Lady Oram laughed.

"Are courage and valour your favourite virtues?"

"No, but they always command a certain admiration. I could not like a man who was a coward, and I don't like a woman to be

timid. I admire people who face a danger or a difficulty with the certainty that God is near. Trust is my favourite virtue—faith in God, and trust in man.”

“My child,” said Lady Oram, kindly, “have you read no history? Cannot you take heed to its lessons?”

“History has given me many examples of trust, ma’am. ’Tis true, there may be many more just the other way. But because there are but a few incomparable pearls in the world, and many false ones, why should we refuse to use the real ones? Let me keep my trust; if I succeed in gaining but one true pearl, surely I shall be happy. And I have one.”

“How enthusiastic the child is! Who is he, my dear?”

“It is not a he,” I answered, a little dashed by a sudden petulance in her manner. “It is Marblette, my sister.”

“Ah! life would be indeed sad if one could not trust one’s own kith and kin; which reminds me that either you or I must go and see after the invalid. Be kind now, and let it be me, anxious as I see you are to run to her. I am tired, and Mr. Mallerdean is not. He would like to walk to that plantation, where you will find my lord marking trees. I think I can ‘Trust’ you both together, and that you will not quarrel.”

“I will try not,” I answered, with a little dignity, though smiling.

“I will promise not,” answered Mr. Mallerdean.

“Then farewell. I hope I shall find that nice Sissy asleep. You do not think so? I read a doubt of my assertion in your face.”

“So do I,” said Mr. Mallerdean laughing.

I was a little provoked. But, in truth, I knew that Sissy, methodical and prim, had no more lain down to sleep than I had.

Our boxes would be unpacked, everything arranged in supreme order, our dresses laid out, ready to be put on, and Sissy would be either writing to Philip, or reading an improving book.

Lying down, indeed! No, she would be making up for the lost time of having spent two whole days in bed.

When Lady Oram went away, and we were left to ourselves, which seemed to have the same effect upon me as if I was only walking with grandmamma (and how strange that was, for, when in company, I lost nothing that he did or said, blushed with delight when he spoke to me, and was altogether in a confused, bewildered, exquisite state), he said to me,

“Now you shall choose your own pace; hitherto we have sauntered, but it seems to me as if you enjoyed a brisk walk, even a run. The latter we must not do, as Lady Oram can see us from her windows, and his lordship from his plantation. Besides, if we ran that would shorten our walk.”

“Thank you. I feel persuaded that, without presumption, you do not find walking with me disagreeable.”

“I am pledged not to quarrel, if possible; you are sworn not to do so, therefore we may infer that our walk will be pleasant.”

"Will you permit me to take up some part of it by a short history of myself? Your frank look tells me you are surprised at the request, but as you have such trust in man, I think it unnecessary to assure you I don't wish to talk of myself from vanity."

I could only acquiesce in these sentiments, for it was impossible to deny I was surprised. It did not appear to me essential that I should know anything of his antecedents. He was simply the man who, by a look, had driven away a prejudice, by a look had acquired a certain power over me—a power of which, at present, I did not suspect the strength; but I never speculated on his history. Now, however, I was aware of a certain curiosity.

"I am anxious to know," said he, "how far you and I should assimilate in opinions and sentiments, born under such very different circumstances, and habituated to such totally opposite associations. I hope you have noticed the interest I take in a character so artless as yours. I never before came in contact with one, therefore, as a matter of curiosity, I thought we might amuse ourselves by comparing notes; for, at present, though we live in the same world, and the same country, I cannot imagine two people more diverse."

"I like the notion very much," I answered; "I am the country-maiden, and you are the world-wise man. I daresay after all we shall not differ so much."

"I sincerely hope not. But you will understand that I ought to tell you a little about myself to make us on equal terms. For, if the truth must be told, your character is portrayed in your face."

"And do you think yours is not so also? In that we are alike. I knew immediately that I should always like the name of Peter, because of the smile with which you greeted my dismay at hearing it."

"So you did dislike it?"

"Well, Marblette and I—we were obliged, we had a reason; but, in fact, I cannot tell you—it will suffice for you to know that, after enumerating various things that we wished those we liked to possess, a pretty name was one of the chief."

"And Peter was pronounced horrible?"

I was too confused to answer.

"But you have conquered that prejudice, so let me only express my gratitude; and the more so, because I love my name of Peter dearly. Not only does the sound of it remind me that I inherit it from a long line of ancestors, but also that 'Peter Mallerdean' is responsible to the world for doing his duty properly therein. That surname is the watchword of our family. No dishonourable epithet is to be connected with it, no shadow may fall on it. Whosoever hears it must consider the name a sacred charge, and, be he rich or poor, he must keep it honourable. In whatever country it is mentioned, good, pure, noble deeds must be connected with it. Such has been the case with all the Peter Mallerdeans hitherto—such I wish to be my own case. It is hardly to be expected that so young a girl should care for her ancestors."

"I do not know much about them," said I; "and I think they cannot be traced very far, so this must excuse me. But I like reading all about the Danes, and the sea-kings, and feel not a little proud of inheriting some of their wild blood."

"Then you can understand that I am very proud of my lineage. For generations and generations, Mallerdeans (not all of them Peters, you will be glad to hear) have lived and died at Mallerdean. They have always been wealthy and prosperous. They have frequently added to their possessions. Without title or honours, they keep the uppermost place in the county where they reside, from the mere quality of their ancient blood."

"And their virtues," I interposed.

"Of that it does not become me to speak. I will leave it to the mercy of your favourite 'Trust.' But you will understand that a position so marked—an idiosyncrasy so defined—exercises an influence upon us from our cradles. We seem to live in a world wholly made up of Argus eyes. We are taught to be ever conscious, and to recollect too that we do not live to ourselves, and that what we say, or do, or think is not limited in its consequences to ourselves, but has an influence beyond us, and we must be worthy of this power. Example is contagious, and the sense of responsibility of our actions is early laid upon us. We Mallerdeans are not ignorant of the Power thus given to us. We are proud of it, we prize it, and we are ever studying to deserve it. We have to pay a penalty in the self-consciousness it entails. We are not easy-going nor pleasant. On the contrary, we are cold, hard, proud, and self-contained. Nothing but my political principles, that are founded on largeness of heart, has prevented me from becoming disagreeably bigoted and arrogant. We are obliged to be better than our neighbours, and it is not easy to keep up one's humility."

"You at least seem aware of your faults," I remarked, as he paused.

"The faults of those who lived before me seem nothing in comparison with my own. An only son, almost an only child, losing both parents before I was six years old, I was educated in the belief that Peter Mallerdean, of Mallerdean, had no need to envy the king on his throne. For love of my father, who seems to have been wholly without the meaner vices, the whole county lavished on his little son the affection that was rightly his. I was considered the child of the county. The highest gave me the place of an idolised son, whilst the middle ranks considered me their recognised chief. It was not possible that I should grow up and answer all their expectations."

"Why not? People like those best whom they have as it were created."

"Let us leave that argument alone then, for we have not time to pursue it. I return to the original question. I hold myself rather aloof from the world—not exactly thinking, like the Pharisee, that I am better than other men—but that I am a Mallerdean. You appear to identify yourself with everything and everybody—and seem

grateful that the Courtenayes are allowed a small space in the world. I have caught myself rejoicing that the pure blood of the Mallerdeans has concentrated itself into the persons of my sister and myself. You tell me, with sparkling eyes and glowing cheeks, that few people can boast of such a numerous sisterhood as the Courtenayes; and I so far agree with you, that I think there cannot be too many of them. I pursue my way—the Mallerdean way—let us say it is unexceptionable—but it has no pleasant windings—it turns neither to the right nor left. For you, the colour of your cheeks changes with every emotion of your mind; you feel for everybody, you are interested in everything. I am unmoved—I feel that only a startling event in the political world, or a Mallerdean misfortune, can make my pulse quicken.”

“But is that good? Almighty God loves all the creatures that on earth do dwell.”

“Habit is second nature. If called upon to act on the same matter, we must think alike, because right and wrong are broadly defined.”

“I have found people differ in their estimate of right and wrong.”

“That must be in small things then, of no consequence. Meanwhile ’tis glorious to carry on family virtues as well as names. I should be ambitious to exceed all the former Peters in high qualities. Of that we must argue another day—for here we are within hearing of Lord Oram’s axe, which he wields with the strength of one of his own work-people. He will not suffer me to be idle, I know. What will you do with yourself?”

“I will wield a battle-axe too, if he wishes it.”

But Lord Oram laughed at my offer, so I stood a short time watching the woodmen at their work, and then I wandered into the wood, and sought out for Sissy a wreath of ivy to wear at dinner, a garniture she much delighted in.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### A RISE AND FALL.

**M**ANY were the thoughts and fancies in which I indulged when I found myself alone in the wood. This time with less of the bewildering thrilling sensations of the drive in the buff chariot. There was a calmness, not to say an awe, stealing over me. In the little history of himself, Mr. Mallerdean had somewhat excused himself for the cold hauteur of his manner when he first came to our house.

Imperturbable as he said he was, his nature had been stirred within him at meeting a character, as he said, so entirely opposite to his own. It was due to his Mallerdean nature to show, on the first opportunity,

that he had conquered the unwonted feeling, and was no longer swayed by it.

And yet—and yet—my woman's nature taught me that he had succumbed again. An instinct told me that this strong-minded, self-assured, lofty man, with his ancient blood, his ancestral pride and family virtues, was pleased with, interested in, perhaps a little fascinated by me, an eighteen years old girl, who had little to recommend her.

"There is in this man, this Peter," I thought, "a something that interests me beyond all other persons I ever saw. It is not unlikely, did he ask it, that I might not find it so distasteful to be beloved by him as I had found it in others. Yet, at present, he thinks a little scorn of himself that he has been so suddenly interested in me. For him to love, to marry, would entail the high considerations and provisions, after the manner of a royal courtship. The county must be consulted, preliminaries set forth—a great ceremony of introduction. Perhaps a young lady had been purposely born, educated, reared, solely to be his wife.

How stately she would be! When they met, she would curtsy thus, and he would bow to the ground. At the end of a week he would probably ask leave to kiss the tip of her little finger—she would blush a little disdainfully, and beg him to remember that she was not yet his wife. Ah! how different from me! What should I do? Oh! I am ashamed to think what I would do! I feel that I should not like him at all if he had not kissed all my fingers long before that—perhaps—oh! Sissy, Sissy, what would you say if you only saw into my brain?—you would not speak to me for a week. I will think of Mrs. Mallerdean that is to be. Of course he must marry—he does not wish to be the last of all that long string of grand Mallerdeans. I wonder if his sister is like him. Why has he not married? He must be thirty. Is that young lady not born yet, or is she like a queen-bee, imbibing royal food to fit her to be Mrs. Mallerdean, of Mallerdean? Will she call him Peter? I trow not. She will "sir" him, probably, and he will "madam" her. Think of me being "madamed!" I should put my hand on his mouth and say—

"What?" cried Lord Oram, close in my ear.

I started of course, and blushed like a poppy. Fortunately Mr. Mallerdean was at some distance, and the sudden shock of surprise drove him and his intended wife out of my head.

It was time to go home. On our road there, Lord Oram was, as usual, very chatty, and his favourite sentence slipped out with a glibness and recurrence that was truly infectious. I felt a desperate sort of desire to use it myself, it sounded so piquant. Happily I remembered my father's words regarding little demons.

I found Sissy had displayed for my use the coral ornaments. I was provokingly anxious to wear grandmamma's gold chain. Somehow this day had crowned me with a mysterious happiness. I should like



to sanctify the remembrance by wearing the gold chain for the first time.

As for making Sissy understand the romance that connected it in my mind with happiness, that was simply impossible. The grimmest, most inexplicable language ever invented would be sooner comprehended by her.

So I helped to dress her with great alacrity, fastened her ivy wreath round her head with much skill, submitted with extreme patience to all her little fid-fads about my own dress; dawdled a little, chatted a little, in spite of her remonstrance about the time; finally begged her to go slowly downstairs, and I would follow.

Innocent of the least suspicion of any audacity on my part, she obeyed. I overtook her at the drawing-room door, and in the anxiety to make a proper entrance, which was a great business in our day, she did not look at me. How fervently I hoped the drawing-room would be full of people; Sissy as fervently hoped that there would be no one.

Lady Oram was alone, and complimented us upon our manner and appearance, which was a piece of civility a hostess then considered as part of her duties. Sissy would make no remonstrance in her presence, and soon I felt that she had no inclination to do so. In the hasty glimpse that I had had time to take of myself, after putting on the gold chain, I was satisfied it became me very well.

There were only nine people to dinner. Again I sat between Lord Oram and Mr. Mallerdean. It seemed to me that the magic of the gold chain brought me wonderful happiness during that dinner—it inspired me.

The next day four of us walked to church, and the remaining five went in her ladyship's coach. One of the guests had demurred about going.

"The devil's in it!" said my lord, "but you must go to church!"

Thus abjured, he went.

I was the only lady who walked, and by degrees Mr. Mallerdean and I outwalked the others.

"You do not sing or play, I find," he said.

"No; I am without accomplishments of any kind."

"Is that your own wish, or because you have no talent?"

"A little of both, perhaps. We are so many. It is not right to waste upon mediocrity what would help to make genius perfect."

"I think you are wrong. Mediocrity is better than total ignorance."

It was beginning to seem to me quite natural that Mr. Mallerdean should interest himself even in my faults. Evidently there was to be no more hauteur on his part. Whatever struggle he might have had with his fears or his prejudices, it was now over. He was not going to permit any of them to influence his manner.

Feeling this, rather by intuition than actual realization, it seemed to me only right on my part to let him see me as frank and unconstrained as if I was in no other society than my sisters'. The feeling that he was a man I could love (the only one my heart whispered) was not so strong in me as the maidenly fear lest I should show it. That display of hauteur on his part had done me good service. If anything was to come (I dared not even whisper to myself what might come), he alone should be answerable for it. So, as if arguing with Sissy and her "oughts," Marblette and her pretty bantering, I questioned and remonstrated, and laughed all the way to church, and all the way home again. And his eyes sparkled, his cheeks coloured, his whole appearance was as unlike the stately Mr. Mallerdean of the Wednesday before, as if they were two different people. So in my heart I called one Mr. Mallerdean, and the other "Peter!" Yes, Peter.

"Nothing may ever come of this; I may go home again, with the conviction that I am never to see him more; but still I can say 'Peter' to myself!" And with the growing elevation of thought and feeling that love awakening in a young girl's heart brings with it, I became heroic in my estimation of everything. And as to the future Mrs. Mallerdean, that young lady about to emerge from a royal cell, to fulfil her noble destiny of being queen of Mallerdean, heaven itself was not too high a boundary for me to invest her with good—the earth was none too large to procure blessings for her, and the sand on the sea-shore would scarce suffice to count up the prayers I would invoke for "Peter's" wife.

Why I persisted in forcing this fictitious wife in imagination upon Mr. Mallerdean, I know not. I think it was a blind to my own heart. It was as yet too shy to admit even to itself all it would and could do for him who was called Peter. So it imagined an imaginary wife, in whom it appeared no more than right and meet to give up one's very existence for her sake.

That evening Lady Oram would have some sacred music. Low and soft, I was so far gifted with a sense of music I could make seconds to Sissy's hymns. It was seldom the custom in those days to pay much regard to the well-keeping of Sunday. Lord Oram himself was excessively particular in going to church, as might be judged by his mode of dealing with a refractory guest; neither would he permit any servant to remain in his establishment who required, as he described it, "to be driven to the parson." It was also his custom always to take off his hat to any clergyman whom he met, and remain uncovered while he talked to them. But this was all the outward show of religion that he made. He did not scruple to own that he hated the day after two o'clock on a Sunday. In the country he could not slip off to his club and play at cards, as he did in London, unknown, as he hoped, to his wife.

Her character excited surprise in those days, though it would not do

so now. She was sincerely pious, and no matter who might be her guests, it was her custom on Sundays to have all her younger servants into her private room, where she read to them, and exhorted them. She told Sissy and me to come there to help her. Sissy, who, as before mentioned, was a very good musician, tried to teach them to sing the evening hymn. Lady Oram desired us to be ready to sing in the evening down-stairs.

I was nothing loth. Mr. Peter had been rather severe, as I considered, in his remarks about accomplishments. I knew I could sing such easy things as hymns very well, and if Sissy's pretty, reverent, pure style of singing sacred music was not well seconded by me, I thought I should be unworthy to wear grandmamma's chain.

What a vast pleasure doth God give into the hands of those who have a gift! I felt for the first time what power a talent gave one for good or evil. Even our little soft, low hymns, sung with feeling and purity, fell like a sort of dew on the hearts of those who heard us.

Impulsive in all he did, Lord Oram had them over and over again. Swearing less each time, which so far proved that they had a certain power for good over him. Tears often rose to the eyes of Lady Oram; she was a tender-hearted woman. All the others seemed touched. But my Mr. Peter was out of sight, even had I nerved myself to look at him. So only when we were going to bed did I know if he liked it; he did not shake my hand as usual, but he held it for a moment; then pressed it suddenly, saying, as he let it go, in quite a whisper, "Thanks, for the sweetest moments I have ever known."

The next day, Monday, I was to have my first ride.

Sissy seemed to eschew telling the grand secret that we had grandmamma's habit; so I said nothing either, and it was just as well that we did not, for the habit fitted beautifully, and excited great admiration. Indeed, if the truth must be told, even Sissy said,

"How pretty you look in that habit and hat!"

I felt the colour rising every minute in my face because of their compliments; and I was glad to mount my steed, which was styled a Galloway.

"I hope," whispered Mr. Peter to me, as he put me on to it, "that such undisguised admiration will not prevent my Lady Diana taking heed to her reins. It will not do, after so much praise, to have a fall."

"You should not laugh at me," I answered a little pettishly; "I did not make myself."

"That I'll be sworn," he replied warmly; "only a master-hand can produce master-work."

I mention this compliment only to show how Mr. Peter was getting on; in addition to it, I had such a look! My heart gave a great bound, and I felt that, much as I had blushed before, now I must be almost a blazing scarlet; and every time, whenever I thought of that

look (and I am afraid I liked to think of it very often), I got as red as ever.

Fortunately, the novel sensation of being on horseback, which was extremely delightful, obliged me to think of something else. But the two together—namely, the look and the riding—so intoxicated me with happiness, that I felt exactly as if either I or my horse had wings. It seemed as if nothing could stop us. Now I should like to pause, and say no more ; but if I tell one thing, I must tell all.

The Lady Diana, either unsettled in reason, or inexperienced in seat, was run away with by her steed, and thrown. I think the latter would not have happened had not the horse stopped suddenly ; at least, so Lord Oram said.

"Damn me, I never saw a girl sit a horse better ; but, damn me, sir, the most experienced rider in the world will pop over its ears if a beast pulls up as short as that—eh ! eh !"

I was not at first conscious that my steed was running away ; I thought he only felt like me, too happy for anything but flying.

Then warning cries, and sudden stopping of their steeds, awoke me to the fact that something was the matter. I tried to stop my horse ; I thought the bridle was hitched into a bar of iron ; I began to grow breathless, giddy ; my hat, that becoming head gear, flew off ; my combs fell out, my hair came down, my hands grew sore. I lost my whip. I began to experience an awful stitch in my side ; but in the middle of all I wondered where my horse had put his ears.

To end the matter, just at a curve of the road was a gate. The horse stooped suddenly opposite it, and over I went horse and gate, falling into a most abominable puddle, that splashed me all over !

"What a spectacle is the Lady Diana !" I thought, "I am glad no one is here." But before I had thought it, there was Mr. Mallerdean ! Somehow he had cut across country, he said. He was quite pale, but I dare not look at him a second time. He picked me up ; and collecting all my curls back, he wiped my face, which was muddy, with his handkerchief ; and he asked me, in a sort of trembling voice, if I was hurt.

"No," I said, "the Lady Diana has only had her fall."

"Thank God !" he answered, so fervently, that I looked up ; but oh ! in what a hurry I looked down at one side, on the other, anywhere. That look was very much more expressive than the first one. Instead of making me red, I felt quite faint and white.

"You are hurt," he said, so tenderly.

"No, indeed no. Oh ! my habit ! Look at it ; it is dear grand-mamma's, what will she say !"

"Your grandmamma's habit," he echoed, in just that sort of perturbed voice a person uses when he wants to affect unconcern.

"Yes, we had not a habit, so grandmamma lent us hers, that was made for her when she married."

At that moment Lord Oram rode up, with my hat and whip and one of my combs.

The horse was soon caught; and after I had put myself tidy, and fastened my hat, I asked his leave to mount again.

"That's my plucky girl! Of course you shall, and I will lead you home myself."

And three times in that short sentence did he threaten himself with condign punishment.

But I did not wish to be led, and said,

"I think he would not have got the better of me had I known at first that he was running away. Do let me try and manage him myself once more. I will be very careful."

Lord Oram insisted upon my doing as I liked, in spite of Mr. Mallerdean's remonstrances.

"Now, Peter, don't go and make a fool of yourself, I beg. You are not a love-sick boy, are you, with your nonsense and palavering? It won't do her any harm if she is run away with again. Besides, if we go home after a different fashion to what we came out, my lady will smell mischief. I haven't a terrier in my possession that noses a circumstance sooner than she. Your habit will soon dry, my girl, and then we will give it a brush."

As he said this I looked at Mr. Mallerdean, and he, somewhat recovered from his fright, smiled, saying,

"Do you know that habit belonged to her grandmother?"

"The deuce it did! Well, all I have got to say is, that if her grandmother looked as pretty in it as my girl, she must have been a devilish handsome woman."

We stopped at one of the farm-houses, where I was brushed, and washed my face, and I became quite happy again at seeing that dear grandmamma's habit would not be a bit the worse.


Well, that evening was full of serene remembrances, though Mr. Peter said but little to me. He took me into dinner, as if it was a matter of course, and for a moment placed his hand over mine, that hung on his arm.

"I am glad I have you safe," he said.

By this I understood that henceforward there was a bond between us—notwithstanding that intended wife of his, of whom I did not seem to think as kindly as heretofore.

## CHAPTER XIV.

## LESSONS FOR THE FUTURE.

URING the evening, Lady Oram sat knitting—Lord Oram, with his reading lamp on his own peculiar table, was getting up the arrears of neglected newspapers—Sissy was resting in a comfortable chair—and I was busy making a bag of beadwork, which was to be a present to Lady Oram when finished. It was a work requiring a good deal of ingenuity, not only to shade the flowers delicately and appropriately, but also to keep the beads even and smooth. It was my first attempt in this line.

Mr. Peter came to the table where I sat with my packets of different-coloured beads around me, and my head bent diligently over my work, the pattern of wreaths before my eyes. I did not look up when he approached. I feigned to be counting the number of pink beads in a rosebud.

"What are you so industrious about? What Penelope's work are you engaged upon?"

"Not Penelope's," said I, "for I expect to have finished my task before long."

"But what, then, are you weaving like another Arachne?—and what are these?"

He took up, as he spoke, some of the small white papers in which the beads were placed, each after their colour.

"Are you making flowers of gems, or weaving a piece of tapestry? And for what purpose, except to spoil your eyesight? You are recklessly lavish of a precious gift."

"It does not hurt my eyes at all, I assure you; and you cannot imagine how pleasant it is to see your work grow under your hand, and to think how pretty it will look when finished, and made up, and the bag—for it is to be a bag—lined with blue silk, and trimmed with beautiful tassels of beads in shades like the work."

"No! I can only see that the work is likely to blind you, and that the bag will be of no use."

"Have, then, none of the Mallerdean ladies ever embroidered?"

"Yes. At Mallerdean there is a suite of furniture embroidered in satin, in flowers of their natural colour. Each piece is a real work of art; the designs were those of my grand-aunt herself, so that the embroidery was not a mere counting of threads, and copying."

"Then you do not admire my poor bag?" said I, rather piqued, for I had thought it very pretty myself, but Mr. Mallerdean's words had disheartened me. Tell me about this grand-aunt—was she a Mallerdean?—and what was she like?"

"She was a very remarkable woman," replied Mr. Mallerdean; "and there is a romance connected with her, that almost amounts to

a family legend. There is a portrait of her, taken late in life, which is very beautiful, with a noble, steadfast look, which shows that age has little to do with the highest type of beauty."

"Is it of your great-aunt, Mrs. Chambellan, you are speaking?" said Lady Oram. "I have often heard that there was a history connected with her, but I don't think I ever heard it throughout. Your Yorkshire property came into the family at her death, I think?"

"Yes," said Mr. Mallerdean.

"Tell us the history, Peter," said Lord Oram, pushing away his newspaper, and composing himself in his chair.

I looked at Peter, and my eyes seconded the request.

"I should like to hear it very much," said Lady Oram, "for I never knew exactly who she was, nor how she came to marry your great-uncle."

Sissy looked across from her chair.

Mr. Mallerdean glanced at me, and said—

"If you are none of you afraid of a long story, of course I can only feel proud to entertain you with the history of my great-aunt, though to speak of one's own family is like talking of one's self; but, of course, if Lady Oram commands, there is nothing for me but obedience. So, after this modest preface, I will begin :

"Oates was the name of an old Yorkshire family, who had once held a high place among the landed gentry of the county. In the time of Richard Cœur de Lion one of the family had been a crusader, and he now lies, with all his insignia about him, in a little old church, built at his death, and founded, by his will, for the good of his soul. The succeeding generations were all buried there, and repose under monuments and brasses which testify to their name and fame when they were in the land of the living.

"In the lapse of time the family fell into decay, and gradually merged into the ranks of yeomen, retaining only a remnant of the broad lands that had once been theirs. One branch of the family had settled in Staffordshire—in very humble life; some of the members were small farmers, little more than labourers themselves; one was a village blacksmith, and of him I met with a notice once, as I was detained at a road-side inn, whilst my horse was baited. In an old torn volume of the 'Farmers' Monthly Register' there was mention made of the death of John Oates, blacksmith and farmer, who, in his life, had obtained the name of *honest*! And there was a brief sentence recording the esteem in which he had been held for his good sense and high character for being 'just and honest in all his dealings.'

"I felt proud that he should have been connected, although distantly, with the Mallerdeans, and I induced the landlord to allow me to become the possessor of the volume."

Here Mr. Mallerdean looked at me, as if to say, "You see we Mallerdeans value our good qualities without respect to rank or station."

But this is a digression.

"In 1746 the eldest branch of the family resided near York. The family consisted of the father, daughter, and two sons, and they lived in what had once been the mansion-house. It had been built originally in the reign of Stephen, and was a curious specimen of different kinds of architecture, bearing traces of gradual transformation from the stronghold of the days when it was no metaphor to call every man's house his castle, down to the more peaceful dwelling of lawful and orderly times. At the time of my story it had become little more than a farm-house. What had once been the tilt-yard, was filled with comfortable barns, cart-sheds, and hay-stacks. A low wall of rough grey stone separated this yard from a small garden which lay round the house, while a straight gravel walk, edged with old box of remarkable growth, led up to a porch on the sunny side of the house. It was a fine old porch, embowered with ivy and creepers, which covered the chimneys, and, indeed, nearly the whole of the house, with their luxuriant growth.

"The old gateway at the entrance of the yard was still surmounted by the 'coat armour' of the family, carved in stone—six horse-shoes and a scallop shell. The old gates had long since disappeared, and been replaced by a strong five-barred gate. The 'coat armour' was covered with moss, and a fine crop of grass, house-leeks, tufts of gilly-flower, and other waifs and strays of plants, grew amongst the stones of the walls, and would have given a desolate aspect if the farm-yard arrangements had been less orderly.

"Halsted Hall, as the place was called, was about six miles from York, and stood more than a mile from the high-road. The only approach to it was up a long rough lane, so much cut up by carts and cattle, that except in the height of summer, or depth of winter, it was impracticable for foot-passengers. The father and brothers attended the different fairs and markets; the sister, Mary Oates, managed the house and dairy. She led a secluded life, for they had no neighbours. On Sundays they went to the church founded by their ancestor, where such of the farmers and labourers as lived within distance also attended. There was only service in the afternoon, and not always that.

"Mary Oates, at the time I speak of, was about seventeen. Her mother had died the year before. She was a woman who had received more education than was usual, and to her Mary owed all the instruction she ever received, and a tinge of refinement in her manner and bearing far superior to that of her father and brothers. It so happened that a relative of her mother's, who resided at York, was to be married in the spring of 1774, and the old farmer, his sons, and Mary were invited to the festivities. The old man refused to go; he was getting old, and did not like to be put out of his usual habits; and he did not wish Mary to go either, but her mother begged that she might have a little pleasure for once.

"Mary Oates was a handsome girl, with a beautifully built figure,



and an air of composure and dignity unconsciously acquired from her position, which was one of great responsibility for so young a person.

"It was a very fine wedding, for her uncle was a wealthy man, and quite approved of the match made by his daughter, and showed his sense of it by giving a grand ball, besides feasting all his tenants and work-people. Several of the officers in garrison at York came to the ball; amongst others, my great uncle, Captain Chambellan, a very fine gentleman of the time, I assure you. He was handsome, dashing, full of life and jollity, such as one cannot understand now. He would dance all night at a ball, be at cover to the meet next morning, and after a hard day's sport, would sit down to a deep carouse, and yet be as fresh and gay the next day as if he had followed out the precepts of Lewis Cornaro. His manners, too, were those of a fine gentleman, the type of whom has passed away. He considered it a part of his vocation to flirt with every woman he came near who possessed the least pretension to youth or good looks; but he was like the hero of the old song—'who loved and he rode away.'

"None of the mothers—none of the daughters—could flatter themselves that he had been secured for 'a humble servant,' as lovers were styled in those days. There were prettier girls than Mary Oates in the ball-room, superior to her in position and fortune, but Harry Chambellan, my great-uncle, fell in love with Mary Oates, much to his own astonishment, and the jealousy of the other ladies, who considered themselves far more deserving of notice.

"There was to be a hunt-ball in a few days, and the young man asked Mary to be his partner. Her return had been fixed for the next day, but the good-natured mother tried to persuade her to remain, promising to make matters straight with their father. But the old father, having an instinct of what might happen, appeared in person the next day to carry off his daughter, and would listen to no remonstrance. Mary was wanted at home, and home she must come.

"Probably Harry Chambellan would have forgotten his fancy, if it had not been for an accident in the hunting-field, in the following autumn, which was the means of reviving it in full force. His horse fell, and sprained its shoulder in clearing a fence of rough loose stones. It was impossible to remount, or to return to his quarters on foot. Halsted Hall was the nearest habitation, and young Oates, who was in the field near at hand, cordially invited him to go home with him.

"The old farmer would as soon have seen an evil spirit inside his doors as a dragoon officer, to say nothing in the case as it had fallen out. At first he tried to keep Mary employed elsewhere, but in the course of the evening he had become so charmed with his guest, that when he was about to depart the next morning he cordially invited him to return. Of this invitation my uncle availed himself. His admiration for Mary revived in full force; he fell deeply and seriously in love with her, so that he made a formal proposal of marriage for her to her father, who willingly gave his consent, so much was he fascinated by

his guest. If he thus charmed the father, his success with the daughter is not surprising. He was very attractive, and had done his best to win her affections.

"But old Mr. Chambellan, Harry's father, had not seen Mary, so could not be expected to be charmed with her—in fact, he did not like the match at all. Of course when he read the history of the county of Yorkshire, he would make no objection on the score of family; but the present want of fortune and position was a great drawback upon their past importance. However, he temporised; he did not venture to oppose his son's fancy, but he wished, as he said, to be quite sure that his son knew his own mind, and he therefore stipulated that there should be a delay of twelve months before the marriage took place, when his son would be a little more than one-and-twenty, and Mary would not be nineteen. This sounded reasonable enough. He wrote politely to the farmer, and paternally to Mary; he summoned his son up to London, where his duties as Member of Parliament required his presence; applied for leave of absence for his son, and got him safely off on his travels before the young man quite knew whether he had been thwarted or indulged.

"At first his letters to Mary were the love-letters of a fervid young man; after awhile he began to find letter-writing a burden; and finally, as the novelty of foreign scenes and the distractions of foreign society increased, the remembrance of Mary faded away, and he began to feel it a great bore that he was bound to return to be married at the end of a twelvemonth.

"Before, however, his leave had expired, his regiment was ordered abroad, and he had to join immediately. He had no time to see Mary before he embarked, however much he might have desired it. The regiment continued abroad for two years, and he returned to England, heartily hoping that Mary would have forgotten him.

"Old Mr. Oates had died soon after Harry Chambellan's departure; the farmer's property descended to the sons, and Mary was left entirely dependent on her brothers. Harry Chambellan's letters had entirely ceased; no communication of any kind had been received from him for many months, when the eldest brother chanced to see his name gazetted as colonel in a scrap of old newspaper; the same paper announced the return of his regiment. The paper was two months old. Mary's health and spirits had both been drooping under the pressure of anxiety and disappointment. The brothers consulted together, and without telling Mary anything, they wrote to Colonel Chambellan, asking the reason of his silence, and telling him of their sister's failing health. The father of Colonel Chambellan was dead; Harry had entered on his fortune, he was living in a round of fashionable society, more courted than ever, and daily finding his promise to Mary a heavier burden and a greater bore. He had not announced his return to Mary, though he intended to do so, but he wished to give himself 'as long a day' as possible.

"The letter from Mary's brothers did not make him more willing or desirous of performing his promise, but it made him feel ashamed of his neglect : so he wrote back an answer to say that he intended to act as became a man of honour. He wrote a tolerably affectionate letter to Mary, which he enclosed, bidding her expect him as soon as he could obtain leave of absence. Mary's spirits revived under this kind letter, and of course she forgave him, and the brothers were pacified for the time. But when three weeks elapsed, and Colonel Chambellan neither followed his promise nor wrote again, they began to understand they were trifled with. The elder brother said nothing to his sister, but made a journey to London, where Colonel Chambellan then was ; found him at his lodgings, and demanded satisfaction, with the intimation that the younger brother would claim the same right when the first affair was terminated.

"This proceeding neither dismayed nor displeased Colonel Chambellan ; he admired the spirit of it, and told Mary's brother, with great heartiness, that he would be charmed to give both him and his brother the meeting he desired, but that he had a previous engagement to marry their sister, of which he wished to acquit himself first, as otherwise circumstances might occur to prevent it. He should afterwards be quite at their service, as it was his fixed intention to quit his bride at the church door, never to see her again.

"The brothers looked upon this last assertion as a mere pretext to veil his yielding to compulsion, and they agreed to say nothing about it to their sister. Colonel Chambellan requested that the marriage day might be fixed. A liberal settlement was drawn up by his solicitor, which he signed, and sent down to the bride's family. Mary's brothers would not allow her to draw back, or to remonstrate, they were determined that the affair should be carried out.

"On the day appointed, Mary and her brothers repaired to church. A travelling chariot and four horses stood at the door. On entering, they found Colonel Chambellan pointing out to the friend who accompanied him the monuments belonging to Mary's family. The clergyman stood within the railings in his robes, and the clerk stood outside.

"As soon as Mary and her brothers entered, Colonel Chambellan took his place at the altar, and the ceremony began at once. As soon as it was concluded, the bridegroom bowed gracefully to all present. He said—'You are all here witnesses that I have performed my engagement.' Then, without even looking at his bride, he quitted the church, accompanied by his friend, entered the carriage that was in waiting, and drove rapidly away. Mary was carried senseless from the church, and for several weeks lay dangerously ill."

Here Mr. Mallerdean paused and looked at me. I could not speak, for though I felt very indignant at Colonel Chambellan, still I thought Mary ought to have released him from his engagement, even though it should have broken her heart ; and thought her brothers had been

almost as tyrannical as Colonel Chambellan, and had been cruel to put her in such a position.

Mr. Mallerdean turned to Sissy, and said—

“Well, Miss Courtney, what do you think of my story?”

“Is it ended, sir?” said Sissy.

“No, only half-way through; but it is a halting-place, and I would like to know what you would have done in her place.”

“I really do not know,” said Sissy, demurely. “I think I would rather not judge of Mary until we know the end.”

“Most judicious of ladies, you speak like the Queen of Sheba, with the wisdom of Solomon in addition to her own. To wait for the end before passing judgment is wisdom for all ages.”

“Well, now, Peter, pray proceed,” said Lord Oram. “I am impatient. Did the brothers follow him, and bring him back, or did they appeal to the Lord Chancellor, or what? Damme, if I had lived then, I would have called the fellow out and married Mary myself!”

“Mary herself thought there was something to be said for Colonel Chambellan. When she began to recover, a great change had taken place in her. The real strength of her character began to assert itself. She made no complaint, she did not assume her husband’s name, but called herself Mrs. Oates. The settlement was returned to Colonel Chambellan’s lawyer, with an intimation that it would never be claimed. She pacified her brothers, and would not suffer a word to be said against her husband. She never alluded to him herself. After the shock of his desertion had passed away, she did not seem to suffer from her cruel position nearly so much as might have been expected. Her melancholy and depression had given place to a steady determination of purpose.

“In the brief space during which she and her husband stood before the altar, she had, as she afterwards said, realized the distance between their actual positions in life. With rare superiority of mind, she understood how natural it was that he should have shrunk from fulfilling his boyish engagement. She owned in her heart that she was not fitted to be the wife and companion of such a man as he had now become. If she could have done so, she would have released him from his bond; but, as that was impossible, she determined to fit herself to fill the position to which, as his wife, she had been raised. The brief interview in the church had stimulated her affection for him to desperation, and she determined to win him back or die.

“In those days the education bestowed on women was very limited, but Mary fancied that all gentlewomen moving in good society were well informed. Her first step was to obtain some elementary books from the master of a boys’ school in York, and she began with undoubting simplicity to try to instruct herself in history and geography, and all the branches of information which she fancied every lady of her husband’s acquaintance knew. This

effort brought its own reward. A thirst for information was aroused in her mind ; she had few advantages, but her energy and steadfastness surmounted all obstacles."

"She must have been a woman of great abilities," observed Lady Oram.

"She was a remarkable woman in every way," resumed Peter ; "the very insult which had seemed to condemn her to a faded and joyless existence, was transformed into a source of life and fruitfulness, by the wise humility with which she accepted it."

"Yes," rejoined Lady Oram, "she had a noble object in view, and it purified her, unconsciously to herself, from all the bitterness of wounded vanity."

"A great sorrow nobly borne is a great dignity. Do you think we may turn all our sorrows into nobleness, even when the sorrow is the result of our own faults or mistakes ?" I ventured to ask.

"Yes, my dear, those especially, for it is not very hard to bear the sorrow that comes to us direct, as it were, from the hand of Almighty God, and which we could neither avert nor flee from ; it must be a stubborn heart indeed to rebel against what is sent to us ; it is more difficult to find patience with the ills we bring upon ourselves—to take up our own share of blame and shame—to bear it humbly, and to try to work it out."

"But the consequences last so long," said Sissy ; "are they, can they, ever be worked out ?"

"Yes, if they are honestly encountered and patiently borne. A mistake is mortal, like all other things—and even a mistake that seems the most fatal of all, and likely to last a lifetime, as in Mary's marriage ; you see that when she had worked out her own share of the error, her life became better and richer than it had ever been before, from what Peter calls her 'wise humility.' But, Peter, that is not the end, go on, and do not let us moralise, for it is bedtime already."

"Whilst Mary was thus endeavouring to redeem her time, her husband was trying to forget that he was married. He exchanged into a regiment ordered abroad, and after some time passed in active service—there was always a war going on somewhere in those days—he returned to England and quitted the army. He resided partly in London and partly in Bath, seldom visiting his estates in Essex and Sussex, but making himself remarkable for his brilliant extravagances, which I need not specify. His name occurs in some of the scandalous chronicles of the time, and there is a portrait of him *vis-à-vis* to a beautiful fine lady of the period, with a very high head-dress, in a volume of an old magazine I have at home. He was very handsome. Ten years had passed over. Mary was nearly thirty, but in the matured and still beautiful woman few could have recognised the forsaken girl of nineteen.

"About that time the cousin, whose marriage was the first occasion of her meeting with her husband, was ordered to Bath for her health.

She entreated Mary to go with her, and after some persuasion Mary consented. It was a long journey, and, in those days, a very formidable one. They found pleasant lodgings, and were to remain some time. With some difficulty Mary was persuaded to go into society, and she occasionally accompanied her cousin to the assemblies, which I need not tell you were the height of all that was fashionable.

"When Mrs. Oates, as she persisted in calling herself, and her cousin, arrived at Bath, Colonel Chambellan was absent on some law business. He expected to be absent several weeks; but it was either concluded sooner than he expected, or delayed till another time; anyway he returned to Bath quite suddenly, and found nothing prepared for his reception. He could not stand the forlorn discomfort in which he found everything in his lodging, and so he dressed in a very bad humour, and went to the assembly. He was walking through the rooms in an irritable, ill-used frame of mind, and was proceeding to the card room, when a voice struck his ear which startled him. He turned suddenly, and saw a dignified, beautiful woman, who reminded him of some one he had seen before.

"She turned away on perceiving him. It was Mary, who had recognised her husband, and scarcely able to stand, she took her cousin's arm, and reached the nearest seat. Colonel Chambellan forgot everything else in his impatience to discover who the lady was, and he went hastily to the Master of the Ceremonies, desiring to be introduced.

"Either he was not precise in his description, or the Master of the Ceremonies, being only a mortal man, blundered; but instead of giving the name of Mary, he gave that of Mary's cousin. This mistake gave Mary courage. She exerted herself to please him. Once again Mary's manners worked their spell; he begged permission to follow up the acquaintance, and to wait on her the next morning. Permission being granted, he attended Mary and her cousin to their sedan chairs. The next morning, long before the usual hour of visiting, he was at her door, and of course obtained admittance. Her resemblance to the woman he had once so passionately loved—then so cruelly hated—whom he had married and deserted—was more striking than on the previous evening. Mary's agitation was equal to his own.

"His impetuous appeal was answered. Overwhelmed with shame and repentance, but at the same time very happy, he entreated his wife's forgiveness. Mary had for years dreamed and hoped for some true termination. Mary had not only won back her husband, but regained with tenfold intensity the love which had once been hers—regained it never to lose it more!

"They quitted Bath, and returned to Colonel Chambellan's family seat in Sussex, where they continued chiefly to reside. They had one son, an only child, who died when he was fifteen, and this was the only grief that overshadowed their happiness. They died within a few

weeks of each other, and on his death, for he was the survivor, the estates came into our branch of the family." .

When Mr. Mallerdean ceased to speak, Lord Oram started from the long slumber in which he had indulged, exclaiming, with his customary expletive—"Bless my soul, I was nearly asleep ! How comes it to be so late, and why are we not all in bed?—eh, my lady?"

There was a general bustle of preparation and a lighting of bed candles. All comment on the story was suspended, and I, dreaming, followed Sissy to our room.

## CHAPTER XV.

### WHAT'S IN A NAME?

**I**T was arranged, so Sissy thought, that we were to return home on Tuesday, but upon coming down to breakfast, we found that Mr. Mallerdean had gone off early in the morning, having some business of his own in Newcastle, and was the bearer of a note from Lady Oram to mamma, begging that we might remain a day or two longer.

For my part, I concluded that something of that sort would be arranged, so that we were not to part in any abrupt manner. I had never thought of Tuesday morning being anything more to me than the beginning of another day of mysterious happiness.

But Sissy, methodical and matter-of-fact, who had worn her three dresses the proper three evenings, and had arrived at the crisis of being unable to effect any fresh change in her toilette, was visibly perturbed by this threatened alteration in our programme. I too had gone through all my sets of ribbons—and my white frock was considerably tumbled—but I did not care. After breakfast Lady Oram took us aside, and hoped that, in her desire to keep us, she had not put Sissy to any serious inconvenience.

Dear Sissy—wholly unconscious of the tide surging towards her sister with so mighty a wave, in which she would be either swallowed up, and lost for ever, or ride high in happy triumph—was in a most perplexed state. She had so long deferred to the judgment of grandmamma, that, when called upon to act for herself, she fell into an agony of doubt. We used to tell her, in impudent girlish days, it was fortunate that the laws of nature had long ago settled which was the right hand, and which the left, otherwise she would always have run to ask grandmamma which it was her pleasure she should use.

"Dulce's dress is very much tumbled," she began.

"My maid shall smooth it out," answered Lady Oram. "I understood from your mother you had little time for much preparation—so

we did not expect you to be very gay. Are you expecting letters?" she continued.

Sissy still seemed dubious.

"No! oh no! but I wish I knew if it were right to stay."

"We shall know when Mr. Mallerdean returns, for your mother will write her wishes. Meantime, it is so fine, you can ride to-day, and Dulce shall walk with me."

Sissy gave a sigh of relief; she was properly exhilarated at the idea of a ride, and if not quite so bold as I had been, at all events she escaped a fall. But meantime thus it fell out with me. I went with Lady Oram to the garden, to the rosary, to the keeper's cottage; then she said she would rest a little, while I should take a little run, as far as the lodge, to meet the riders coming home, and see how Sissy was enjoying herself.

"And I may come back to you?" I asked.

"Yes, if you like," she answered, smiling.

When near the lodge, I saw Mr. Mallerdean coming in my Lord's cabriolet. He did not seem surprised to see me, but, jumping out, bid the man drive home, and drawing my arm under his, without a word proceeded to turn up a by-path into a wood.

"I am to meet Sissy at the lodge," I stammered.

"She has gone round the other way; I met them," he answered.

"I am to go back to Lady Oram."

"Yes, I know; this is the prettiest walk to reach her."

So I went on in silence.

"It was on this day week we first met," he remarked, after a while.

Now, I had been wondering if he would remember that. All the morning I had been thinking of it. But I said, "Is it?"

"Is it!" he echoed. "Am I to take 'is it' for an answer?—or will you be frank with me, and say you remembered it also?"

"Will it do for me to say I am glad you remembered it?"

"It will do for the present; but I shall not be wholly satisfied with that. I have been to see your father and mother, and I think eight sisters."

"No, one is a brother."

"Children are dressed so much alike—also I saw your grand-mamma."

"Did you tell her about the habit?"

"No, because my lips would not frame themselves into saying that you had had a fall."

"What good lips!"

"Do you think so? They said a great deal though, perhaps, that you may not like. Shall I tell you?"

"If you please."

"They said to your father and mother much about myself—that I was such and such a sort of man—that I had lived such and such a sort of life—that I was credited with thus much and no more of



worldly wealth. They also said, that a man with such feelings, such ideas, so much wealth, had not fair scope for the first, wholly misused the second, and was unworthy of the last, if he lived only to himself, and remained a single man. That it was, and always had been, my ambition to marry. Once I was engaged (sweet Dulce, I love you even more for that start). Eight years ago I was making preparations to become a happy husband. The engagement was broken on a sudden. This disappointment, which arose out of one of those frailties which are designed by God to keep men humble, that they may not ape the pride of the fallen angels, left severe, nay bitter stings. It seemed effectually to disgust me with your sex. Yet I must marry, for the sake of my name. Had my sister married a commoner, I might, perchance, have left to her and her children what I now felt a distaste to leave to wife or child of my own. They had Mallerdean blood as pure as my own—at least as much as my children would possess—while a wife might have habits and feelings totally at variance with mine. But my sister married, about ten years ago, Sir Brough Lanton, and I scrupled to ask him to merge his family antecedents into mine. Besides, in my heart lurked still the wish to marry, though I scarce knew it. I would picture to myself the happiness of possessing a pure, truthful, loving companion, who would look for my coming as a bird looks for day—who would part with me for an hour as if for a year—who would permit me to gaze into her heart, knowing it was my own. I was not without many little fond fancies that usually belong to your sex. Stern and cold as I seem, the giving of a flower, the magic of a look, the touch of a hand from one in whom I am interested, are to me, not only important events, but necessary to my happiness. I may try, and I have tried to think this a weakness, but I know and feel that it would be exquisite happiness to place power into a gentle, loving hand. What say you ?”

“Yes ; then power would be worth having.”

“True, you have defined the real use of power. Now, do I tire you, talking so much of myself ?”

“No, no, go on. Is that all you told my father and mother ? Did you not, in those eight years, see, or know, or——”

“Yes, sweet stammerer ; I did see and know. One day, we will not say how long ago in those eight years, I was dressing for dinner. I felt an unusual depression. ‘What a mockery are these great dinners,’ I said to myself. ‘You meet people for whom you don’t care, or perhaps have never seen. You all settle whether the weather is good or bad. You question the propriety of Mr. Pitt keeping the country on a war establishment—the gentlemen quote the prices of grain—ladies the dearness of tea, of dress—everybody has some complaint to make ; half the sentences spoken begin with ‘What a pity !’ ‘Tis well if the other half don’t say, ‘What a shame !’ We eat great dinners ; we drink more wine than is good for us ; conversation is resumed again. Hot and irritated people no longer confine them-

selves to the safety-valves of the weather. Those with a private grudge, expose their grudges ; sharp words are exchanged ; 'tis well if there are no more consequences. We are thankful to return to the drawing-room, though some of us are unfit to do so, and with more justice ought to be handed to the kennel ! Judge now if I could be happy that day, dressing for dinner, with such ideas in my mind ? ”

“ You were discontented. In a better state of mind you would have thought differently.”

“ I thought differently before the end of the evening. When I went downstairs, still morose and dismal, the room was full of the company I so despised, or rather eschewed, for I hope I was not wicked, though so doleful in my thoughts. Gazing round, I was rather struck by the pure brilliancy of colour in a cheek turned towards me. I then admired the head, so small, so lavishly gifted with a wealth of dark hair.

“ ‘ Now,’ said I, still splenetic, ‘ that girl with her pretty bloom, her small head, her rich curls, will have some radical defect of a kind that will mar all these advantages. Perhaps she squints.’ ”

“ As I said this to myself, the face was wholly turned towards me. It was lovely, positively lovely ; the eyes were more rich in colour than the hair, the mouth was perfection. Already I could see the row of gleaming white teeth, for she was smiling. There was an artless happiness, yet there was a piquancy in her smile that made her expression superior to her beauty. I watched her for some little time, every moment increasing my admiration.

“ ‘ Ah ! ’ said I, still churlish, ‘ she has a bad figure, she moves ungracefully—perhaps speaks with an accent.’ ”

“ As if to refute my words, a person was brought up to her to be introduced. She rose with a girlish grace and alacrity, it is true, but there was a dignity and air about her, born from a native pureness of thought. I knew at once it was not a manner that can be acquired. You must know that a graceful manner has more effect on me than beauty.

“ I will not describe her more, neither should I have said so much, but to tell you that my megrims vanished. I took the young lady in to dinner, and had the satisfaction of discovering she had a soft yet joyous voice, without the least trace of an accent. It had a youthfully glad tone in it that was like music. It made me happy only to hear it. After spending nearly the whole evening near this sweet creature, who added to her charms in my eyes by a thousand little nameless innocent signs that she was interested in me, I returned to my own room. I confessed to myself that, carried away by the attractiveness of the object, I had never before permitted Peter Mallerdean to lose so much control over himself. The sight of my room recalled my churlishness. I sat down in a chair to take myself to task.

“ Before the eyes of all at the dinner, I stood so far committed that I had singled out a young lady, and made her conspicuous by my

attentions. As yet I knew nothing of her, but that her beauty excited my admiration, and that her manner proved so bewitching as to make me forget myself. She was young—she must be very young, she was so artless. Of her family I knew nothing, but as long as it was respectable—and it must be so, invited to that house—I was not one to care for more. In fact, the prejudices of rank and good blood were rather disregarded by me, as it might be expected from a Whig.

“But I considered it due to myself to show that Peter Mallerdean was not going to succumb, and lose his own individuality for a pretty creature he had only seen once.

“That sore disappointment eight years ago bid him be wary and circumspect; not losing his self-control over his affections until he was duly satisfied they were worthily placed.

“So I came downstairs the next morning, Peter Mallerdean, cased in proof armour, composed of pride and self-confidence. Pretty one, do you know that this armour was pierced through and through by merely a look? The sweetest joy expressed on the sweetest face went through it at once. The sudden change from joy to astonishment, to a pretty grief, followed by a maidenly self-possession and serene dignity, shattered it all to pieces. One of those little delicious traits that, stern man as I am, so delighted me—one of those little feminine impulses that no man calling himself a man can resist—made her immortalise that which had caused her to look up into my face for the first time, to feel the first throb of interest in me. It had been at dinner the evening before, and regarded my name.

“That she should, even when justly indignant that I had tried to fence myself against her attractions after so paltry a fashion—recall to her mind that first look, that first throb—and write the name she had promised the evening before to like for my sake, with the imperishable pen of a diamond, proved her to be of an angelic disposition; the air with which it was done, so frank, so innocent, leaving me without a justification, without even the flattery of thinking she did it for my sake. No, as plain as if she spoke it (you cannot deny it), her manner, her look, her every action said—

“‘I had for a moment a slight interest in the name of Peter. It is worth just recording, and no more.’

“From that moment I helped to throw off my own armour. I went to a dear friend for assistance. I laid bare my heart to her. I had her warmest sympathy. But she made me wait two days, that I might be certain this was no sudden impression. Those two days were centuries! Had I not seen that sweet face in my dreams, had I not pictured it to myself all day, had I not recalled every word, every look, every motion, I could not have waited those two days.

“But we met. How did the sweet dignity of dawning womanhood strive to keep back the blushing consciousness of the girl! How prettily she expressed her opinions! How earnest she was to let us know that she was nearly as wise as Solomon, and that we must not

pretend to talk of simplicity and innocence without her comprehending exactly whom we meant ! Then, when we were left alone, how instantly she became 'prim,' looking prettier than ever ! Mr. Peter might be a fool, and tumble violently in love, that was quite as it should be ; but as for the young queen of an intended paradise, the way to her heart was not to be gained but by——"

"Oh ! sir," I exclaimed, "don't !"

"Don't what ? Tell me, what shall I say ? for how long ? in what manner ? what service shall I perform ? You will not tell me ? Let me talk a little more then, just a little more, that you may be sure this is no idle tale, but true—true as the blue heaven above us, the green earth about us ! We had one walk. I dressed for that day as a man beside himself—intoxicated. When I came down, what new beauty did she not show to me in her white muslin frock, and the rich gold chain that encircled her fair young throat like a charmed amulet ! When a dewy light filled her eyes, and her heart was swelling with some sweet thought, unconsciously her fingers touched her chain, and she smiled like a little child dreaming of heaven. Then came the walk to church ; the seriousness of prayer made me see her features in a new light ; no longer mobile with feeling, and the happiness of youth, they were grave and composed as in a beautiful picture.

"I looked at her, and said : 'It was for a creature like this Adam lost Paradise, and entailed so much woe on his descendants. Could I forgive him ? Yes. She made the paradise—it would not have been one without her.'

"Then the ride—the innocent joy—the excitement—bringing such radiance to the eyes ; and the runaway ! What shall I say of my feelings then ? Did I fear ? No, she sat her horse too well, and, but for that sudden check, would have tired it ere she vacated her seat. But—if you can imagine such a thing without fear—there dawned upon me the perception, what would my life be worth now if separated from her by some fate, stronger than a runaway horse, for ever. If some human creature was to bear her off ? When I thought this, I spurred my horse. I dared not follow her track, lest the galloping feet behind might but alarm her steed still more ; but I cut across the country, and arrived in time to see that sudden overthrow—arrived in time to pick her up, to feel that my destiny was incomplete. I could not, I had not the right to clasp her in my arms, and keep her there as mine—mine own. There was something about her that compelled me to do her homage—that made me treat her as some being just dropped from the clouds, not fallen from her horse. She let me do her little services, and simply, most naturally, held up that loveliest little face to be freed from its stains of mud. If I had not loved her with all the holiest feelings of my heart, if she had not looked up at me with such frank, sweet innocence, I think I should have kissed the mud I took from her face then and there. But I reserved that until I was alone.

"Do you wonder, now, that I went off early in the morning to see her father and mother?—to tell them all they would wish to know of myself, to gain their consent, to return with that sort of exultation that the pearl-diver feels when he emerges—breathless, and scared with the hidden dangers of the deep—clasping to his breast the priceless pearl that enriches him for ever?"

"But stay, have I gained the pearl? See, Dulce, here are letters from your father and mother to you. Shall I give them now, or will you tell me that, instead of liking, you will now love the name of Peter, for the sake of him who bears it? Will you be his wife? No answer. How shall I frame my question so as to gain a ray of hope? Will you sanctify my name to me? Will you let me hear it once more—but not in a tone of astonishment—rather as a whisper that will tell more than words or looks—a little low sound that will make me understand you are pronouncing to yourself the name of your future husband?"

Very low, I said "Peter!"

Then he startled me greatly, and I almost repented. I do not like to write of that. I think Marblette would not have permitted him. I think, indeed, I was to be punished for all those saucy thoughts about the imaginary Mrs. Mallerdean, otherwise I could not have suffered him such licence. I do not know, though, what I would have done at such moments; a thing is over and passed almost before one knows it is done; at all events, too quickly to expostulate. I thought it best to say nothing—only, coming home after a long walk, of which I have too confused a recollection to remember much of it, he seemed as if about to kiss me again. Luckily I got quickly away.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### TRUE LOVE.



AND so thus happened this courtship of an olden time—fifty years gone by. If I have dwelt on it at a tedious length, at best it will serve to show that love is an imperious god, and rules in all ages with much the same power. If I seem to have been quickly won, doubtless there were many before me, and as doubtless many since, who have felt the same subtle influence stealing into their hearts at first sight. That oft-repeated phrase, "Marriages are made in heaven," arises, I imagine, from this same mysterious link that tells souls, "Behold your mate!" It may seem to the wary and circumspect a rash thing to bind yourself for life to a being you have only known a week. But apart from the whisperings of heaven,

bidding you open your heart to receive the impression, there is in true love an abandonment of self. What matters all else, so that you place your trust on the shrine of love, as its first offering? In this love there is neither diffidence nor fear. It is an instinct that prompts you to give, even as you expect to receive. There is to be no reserve, no concealment. Can those give more who exact a servitude of love? Is the few months—the year—a certain period of trial—so sure a forger of love's links that none of them can be broken? They are not broken, for they are not forged. That is not love which is bound. There may be the mutual bargain, the equipoise of "Give thou," "Give I," and perhaps the compact is honourably kept. But is that high-minded, chivalrous life-love? I think not. Yet in my long life I see, and have ever seen, that no two things are alike. The mind of man varies with his features—what may seem indispensable to me is not so regarded by another. What I think of little account is of momentous import to my neighbour. Love to me blazed up in my heart like a torch, and remained there unextinguishable. Love to my sister came slowly—had to be fed with long years of servitude—went through all the phases of a comparison of opinions, habits, loves and likes. She and Philip had known each other from childhood—had grown up to love each other, as a sort of habit. Which love was best, hers or mine? I am compelled to confess I see little difference in the issues. I know not how it might have been—had I—had we—but let me pause. Time enough to write of that when I approach the period.

I ran to my room, like Miranda. "I was a fool to weep for that which made me glad," but joy has as much need of tears as woe. It seemed to me that I must thank God for granting me that without which I now felt it was impossible to live. Blushing, though alone, at the remembrance of all he had said—trembling with an excess of happiness, mixed with a fear lest I might not better that which he so much commended, and lose the praise I so delighted in—weeping because I could not help it—smiling because it was impossible to refrain; with this April face—I was discovered by Sissy.

Sissy concluded that, somehow or another, though she had been riding, and I had not, I must have had another fall.

This made me laugh.

"Was it then that some one had been unkind to me?"

This made me cry

For those she loved Sissy indulged in feelings adequate for a giant. In a blaze of indignation she prepared to find out Lady Oram, and demand reparation.

Again I laughed.

That her indignation might not be wasted, Sissy turned it upon me. Was I ill?—or foolish?—or bent upon teasing her, that I laughed and cried in this absurd manner. What could be the matter?"

Then I cried again.

Upon which, Sissy, as was her wont when seriously displeased, sat down sternly on the edge of a chair, and made up her face, so that it said plainly,

“Not another word will I speak!”

But oh! I made her.

My arms were round her neck in a moment. Not being seated properly on the chair, she found herself on the ground, without knowing how she got there, clasped in the embrace of a creature who seemed to be mad. And now seriously apprehending something, she was no longer angry, but tender, and expostulating, wondering why I kept her in suspense—wondering what could be the meaning of all this. So after a time, red as any rose to my finger ends, I whispered, as the best mode of breaking the news clearly to her mind,

“I have got a Philip!”

It did not clear her mind at all, or enlighten her, she only said, with a little gasp,

“Is Philip ill?”

“No, my Philip is called Peter—Peter Mallerdean, he is to me what Philip is—to you—my husband to be.”

The name lingered on my tongue, as if it loved to dwell there. But Sissy gave me no time for thinking.

“Child, you are very naughty; you ought to have told me something of this, that I might tell our father and mother.”

This reminded me of my letters. Alas! I was so infatuated with love as to have forgotten to read, in his own handwriting, my father's consent; to see, in her fair characters, my mother's written blessing. There are the letters, which Sissy and I read together:—

“A great honour is done you, my dear Dulce; that on your own merits alone are you selected as a wife, by a gentleman of honour and high principles, of ancient family and great wealth; whose position might warrant him to look for a wife in the highest circles. He flatters me by saying, ‘Wild roses bloom fairest and sweetest away from courts and towns,’ and altogether he has led me to thank God that if he pleases you I may safely trust you to his care. The Mallerdeans have long been known to me by name; which name was never mentioned in my hearing without some good deed attached to it.

“In sending you my consent, I would have you weigh well your own private thoughts on the subject of marriage. You are but a girl still; and without disparaging your natural gifts, you are more artless and innocent than most girls of your age. I question if you have ever thought seriously of leaving home; laying aside childish associations, and your home habits; or beginning the life of your proper work in the world, wholly with strangers, in a new county, and in, as it now happens, a very prominent position. This you will have to think of, and remember it is no light matter. Hitherto all the troubles, inconveniences, and pains of life have been borne for you by us, your father and mother. When you marry, you must not only endure your own,

but equally your husband's. It does not follow that because you will be rich, you will be free from care. Your duties will be increased by it. You will have to account for the gifts given you.

"Though it is my duty to warn you, my child, I do not wish to weary you with a homily ; especially at so happy a moment. For if I read truly, there has been an unusual light in my Dulce's eyes of late, that set me thinking on the cause, which is now explained. When I have you by my side, I will continue this sermon ; but at present take your father's best blessing.

"May God keep you, guard you, love you, is the prayer of your loving father."

My mother's letter was as follows :—

"God bless you, my darling child, and make you happy. We cannot but be pleased with Mr. Mallerdean. He has left nothing to be desired by your father and me in what he has said. Indeed, our gratification and pleasure are so great, we must be careful not to let it bias our judgment ; and I charge you to consult your sister very seriously on this momentous subject. She already knows what it is to think of marriage, and will tell you that it is the most important event of your life. You have always been a dutiful and good child, and we shall sadly miss your bright face and gay spirits ; but the very remembrance occurring to me at this moment, reminds me to entreat you to be serious.

"Hitherto your life has been like that of a little brook, running merrily along. Now you have met another, and, running together, you will become a broad and fair river ; your course must always enrich the land through which you pursue your way, you must encounter difficulties and perform duties. But together, remember ; once you are married, it must be as impossible to separate your feelings, habits, and actions from those of your husband as it would be to separate the waters of the two brooks now mingled and running together. My Dulce, the mother's heart in me regrets that you are absent from me at such an important time. Certainly your father and I could not anticipate keeping our children always near us. Indeed, when I have prayed for you, my prayers have always included petitions that some of my numerous girls might be as happy as myself in marriage. For though the cares are doubled, the pleasures are four-fold. But now when the time comes, when I see those for whom your father and I have borne many privations with cheerfulness, growing up to be the delight of our eyes and consolation of our hearts, it is not without a pang that we give them up. It makes me desirous to have you home at once. I must see your pretty smiling face, to judge that the pain of losing you will be lost in the delight of witnessing your happiness.

"Come soon, my love, to the embrace of your fond mother."

Upon reading these letters, Sissy began to do as I had done, laugh and cry.



In the midst of this duet Lady Oram entered. She kissed and congratulated me. I was so confused and bewildered, it was pain to me to listen to her. I wished it was night, that I might lie in my bed in the dark, and "think a good think." I was already beginning to feel the responsibility of having to consult another in all I did and said. For Lady Oram's conversation wholly dwelt upon my good fortune—the splendid match it was for me—the wealth and high consideration of the Mallerdeans—their long desire to get him married—his peculiarities, or rather particularities—his extreme sensitiveness—his sudden admiration of me, arising out of his own love of nature and simplicity—how she, Lady Oram, had considered it advisable to encourage him in it, though the connection was rather beneath him; not that he thought so himself. A lady was a lady—no princess could be more—but he might marry so high—none higher—yet as he would not, his friends must let him marry the first person he in the least affected, whoever she was. He was now thirty, perhaps a little more, there was no time to lose. He had once been engaged to be married to a lovely girl of rank, of fortune, in every way his equal. It was broken off—why or wherefore, Lady Oram never heard. She had married since, and was now a Countess; was very happy, gave splendid entertainments, was much admired, the head of fashion, invited to Carlton House, often at the Pavilion, Brighton, and was altogether a very distinguished person indeed.

As she said this, Lady Oram looked at me, as much as to say: "Very different from you!"

But in another instant she kissed me, and said:

"Nevertheless, my dear, I think Peter was right, you will suit him better—she is quite a woman of the world—she lives only in society—and he wants a wife!"

There was comfort in that. A wife I could be, if Peter loved me. Suppose he changes his mind again, as he had done with this Countess, or as Colonel Chambellan had done about Mary. I should not quarrel with him, but he might quarrel with me. Why did they quarrel? If in every way suited, in fortune, in position, in the general estimation of the world, and yet they quarrelled, how would it be with me, not suited to him in any way, but in his own fancy for me?

The rising misgiving was conquered by my faith in that fancy. Had I not liked him (I might now say loved him) the first moment I saw him? And he also. God had decreed that we were to be married. God had kept his heart and inclination free after that first disappointment, until he saw me; who, born in, and educated among the simple ones of the world, was untainted by the follies, whims, perhaps vices, of the wiser ones.

Thinking thus, as I dressed for dinner, I once more put on my white frock and gold chain, and fastening some roses in my hair, I went

down with the consciousness that the new feelings born in my heart dressed my face with a radiance of happiness born of heaven.

I could scarcely define what I felt, but the air I breathed seemed all ambient and softly perfumed, causing a serene repose in my nature. I was as if full satisfied—my whole frame hushed into the calmness of delight!

Lord Oram met me at the door, and, as was the fashion in those days with elderly gentlemen, he saluted me with a sonorous vehemence. Then, enforcing his opinions after his usual fashion—sending us all, unconsciously and wholly moved thereto by his anxiety to show his delight, to the regions of wrath—he saluted Sissy, who looked immensely prim for a good hour afterwards. At dinner he drank a great deal of wine, as a mode of further showing his joy—all our healths, in every variety. Fortunately, as Lady Oram felicitated herself, he could bear a great deal of wine, and not forget himself; at least, I hope not, for after dinner he brought me as a gift (and he was so proud it was the first) an old-fashioned circlet of gold for the hair. It was very costly, having on it some very rare gems. I presumed Lady Oram did not object, as I think she went out with him to choose it, and it may have been her own. I wore it that night, and, though I did not see myself, I thought it was becoming, for Peter (not that I said his name scarcely even to myself as yet) never took his eyes off me.

While Sissy was playing and singing, Peter drew me into a little ante-chamber, or alcove, for there was no door. Thinking it was now right that I should have nothing secret from him, I gave him my father's and mother's letters to read.

He looked so pleased.

"Thank you, darling," he said.

I can never forget the thrill that rushed through me on hearing him say that. It was as if some one had crowned me a queen. I was his darling! Hitherto Marblette and I had agreed it was impertinent of any one but our father and mother using these terms to us. Even what cousin Robert had ventured on was most distasteful. And now I was in a glory of delight, because a man I had only known one week this very day called me "darling!"

I was afraid Marblette would never believe me. In fact, I thought it best not to tell her. She could not understand until she was in love.

"I like these letters of all things," said Peter, after reading them; "they are, what I love, so natural. In the eyes of the world probably yours is a good match, but in the midst of this gratification your father thinks more of my personal character, and your mother of the loss you will be to her. Thank you for permitting me to read them; thank you still more for that confidingness—that adoption of me at once as a partner in all that concerns you. Oh! Dulce, you have it in your power to make me wonderfully happy. I will not hide from you that

my temper is exacting—is moved by merest trifles, chafing and kindling at apparent nothings. I have tried living with the wise, the learned, the clever, the great ones in name, in hereditary pre-eminence, in the acknowledged voice of their own countrymen; but only in nature, in simple truth, in innocence, have I felt that calmness and peace which enables me to enjoy life. There is a something, without these charms, that makes even the highest intellect unbearable at times.”

“Yet, like Solomon, you cannot bear fools.”

“Yes, that is true. How is it that simple natures are generally foolish ones?”

“I cannot tell, unless it be that simple people are not credited with even the wisdom they do possess.”

“It may be so. Certainly.”

“You will not tire of me as Colonel Chambellan tired of Mary? If I lose you, I would try to win you back—to deserve you; though I would not hold you to a promise as she held him.”

“Darling! the cases are different. I should wish to be perfect, for your sake.”

“You must teach me to be wise.”

“Wisdom is born of love, Dulce. Keep your loving nature, and you will be always wise. But I must not forget why I drew you into this seclusion. I see your father and mother bid you pause ere you finally decide to make me—not figuratively, but indeed—the happiest of men. I also have considered it necessary to tell you somewhat of me and mine, that you may not rush blindly on a path which will not seem to you a happy one. I think you know already I have no near relations except a sister. She is older than I am by six years. She has always lived with me, and exercises that sort of influence over me that a mother might possess. We have never had a dispute but once, and that arose from the breaking off of my intended marriage. The lady—”

Here Peter rose and walked to and fro the little space, as if perturbed. Over his face there came the strangest expressions. Anger, mortification, disgust—a sort of horror—a kind of flush of shame. I rose and put my hand into his. He started, and then all those bad clouds faded from his face. He looked down at me, with the beautiful soft smile that had just entered my heart a week ago. Kissing my hand softly, we sat down again.

“My sister had arranged this marriage, and was vexed it did not take place. This established a sort of soreness on her part, which has never quite healed. I fear she will not like you, as I could wish. Whoever had been my wife in the room of her friend, would not be cordially received by her at first. And she lives with me—she, her husband, and children.”

“And is she to live always, husband and children?”

“If you do not object, my Dulce.”

"I shall like it—she will teach me my duties as a great lady."

"Did I not say she had dislikes?"

"Yes, she will dislike Dulce Courtenaye; but she will never be unkind to a Dulce Mallerdean."

"How you blush, my dearest! Nothing but the wish to say a kind thing made you join my name to yours, and you are overwhelmed with bashfulness at having done it. Well! I will say no more. I think you are right about my sister. She is too truly a Mallerdean to hate anything that bears the name. My sister was less fortunate than myself in her education. She was too much left to governesses and servants, who, impressing her with an idea of her own consequence, have somewhat tarnished an otherwise fine character with pride. She has hitherto been mistress of my house."

"Let her be so still. I am inexperienced."

"Do you sincerely wish it? I own I should be glad if it might be so. What pain my sister might give me in her reception of you, would not be inflicted by her when she understands that a sort of loving younger sister demands her kind advice. You smile. Tell me why you smile?"

"You have not put the meaning rightly."

"Ah, I see; notwithstanding your simplicity, you are not one of Solomon's fools. I ought to have said that any distaste to my marriage will be cruelly augmented by being displaced. And the fact that she not only keeps her position, but has added to her subjects the sweetest creature on earth, will prompt her to think the marriage most desirable. Nevertheless, I am not wholly thinking of her. I am in a manner selfish in my wish to keep her as mistress of my establishment. I want my wife to be my wife, and nothing else. I do not wish her to be encumbered with all the many duties of a great house. It is not as if Mrs. Mallerdean could do so much and no more. It is expected of her to keep up the character of the Mrs. Mallerdeans before her. They kept open house. Their store-rooms were like warehouses—their bounties flowed forth daily—every one, far and near, was their care in sickness, want, or misery. In addition to these home duties, there were large services required by the county of Mrs. Mallerdean. She was always crowned 'Queen of the County,' the instant she became Mrs. Mallerdean. Upon her it devolved to patronize balls and entertainments—she settled the fashions—she was consulted on points of etiquette. Upon her devolved the important question of who was to be visited, and who not. She organized charities, set up schools, adjusted differences. Every one consulted her, no matter upon what subject. Until Mrs. Mallerdean settled her day for going to town, no one even dreamed of ordering their spring bonnets. I do not know if other counties elect a queen after this fashion—but such is our habit."

"The prospect alarms me much. I hope your sister will remain 'Queen of the County,' as well as mistress of Mallerdean."

"I fear not—she was never very popular. Ah, Sissy is shutting up the piano. They will be breaking up shortly, so we must join them. Look! what a strange thing is here!"

I did not think so wise, so grave a person as Mr. Mallerdean would have entrapped me into that corner, merely to—wish me "good night!"

"Dudu," said Sissy, as I brushed her hair, before she put on her nightcap, the frills of which she was smoothing out very tidily between her fingers, "I do not think it was quite correct your withdrawing from the company this evening alone with Mr. Mallerdean."

"He asked me."

"Of course he did. I did not imagine for one moment that you asked him. You are very impulsive, and I begin to think he is also. Though only engaged this afternoon, it seems to me as if you were more of lovers already than Philip and myself."

Innocent Siss! That we certainly were.

"So until we are at home, and we go to-morrow, pray be as reserved as possible. Men don't think at all the better of girls when they are forward—and Mr. Mallerdean ought to know that you must have time given you to love him, and look upon him as your future husband. He called me Sissy!"

Having no answer to make to this charge, I brushed, in my confusion, rather hardly.

"Don't be angry—but of course I must conclude that if he called me Sissy, he also calls you by your Christian name?—perhaps even our childish name of Dudu."

"Yes, both—Dulce and Dudu."

"Then I cannot say I like him the better for doing so. He may be very much in love, but I argue, and so does Philip, that the more one is in love, the more polite one ought to be. I first suspected Philip was in love with me when he began to call me Miss Courtenaye."

"I am not you, Sissy."

"No, and therefore you ought to listen to what I say—because, in addition to being more prudent, I have greater experience."

"People love differently."

"There is a right and a wrong way in everything. Be advised by me. Let Mr. Mallerdean see that you have a proper respect for yourself, and that he must wait awhile before he has permission to call you by your Christian name—or" (and here Sissy blushed a little blush) "kiss your hand."

"Oh, Sissy, Sissy! why, he has kissed me, myself, already, and—and—I thought it very nice of him."

Sissy confronted me, breathless. I laughed.

Then, impetuous as usual, I threw my arms round her neck, and, hiding my face in her hair, I said—

"Ah, Sissy, true love wants no teaching. When Peter kissed me then I knew I was his for ever—that was our seal of betrothment And why not?"

Sissy never answered my question, and never rebuked me any more.

We went home the next day, Peter with us. It was arranged that we were to be married soon—very soon. He was to stay with us for three days, and then return home to make the necessary preparations for the reception of his wife.

"Miss Emily and Miss Effie, I am going to be your brother. Am I to say 'Miss' still?"

"We will ask nurse; but how are you to be our brother?"

"I am going to marry Dudu."

"Oh, don't!—unless you will stay here, and live with us."

"That cannot be, as I have another home, far away."

"Then marry nurse, and take her away."


"Nurse won't marry me."

"We will ask her."

They argued the matter each day, and would lament over the obstinacy with which he still persisted he must and would marry their Dudu—and none other.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### MATRIMONY.

"O you are engaged to be married," wrote Marblette, "to a man enormously rich! and whose name is 'Peter'! Where is that 'Marmaduke' for whose sake you desired to be poor as a mouse, that you might endure all things for him?"

This was the beginning, all the rest of the letter was very different, and it almost seemed, in the exuberance of her delight at my happiness, that we had changed natures. She, usually so self-possessed and reticent in all she said and did, now rattled off a frantic letter, just in my fashion.

But my style of letter-writing changed. After awhile I received my first love-letter, a large square letter, which was franked, so that the first word I saw upon it was "Peter!" What a dear—what a lovely name! I received in all, twelve of these precious letters.

It was the custom in those days for children always to show their parents the letters they received. In obedience to this habit, and not without a certain pride, I took mine to papa.

Papa smiled, and said:

"Do you enlist me as your confidant until Marblette returns, or do you give me this letter to read from custom?"

I answered: "Papa, because I wished to do so."

It pleased me to think of having papa for my confidant. So always when a letter came I took it to him, and when he returned them it was with pleased and gratified looks. He would talk them over with me. He one day said :

"Though at first I did not like the idea that Mr. Mallerdean's sister should live with you, and continue to be the real mistress at Mallerdean, I begin to think that the arrangement will not be a bad one, until you gain some experience in household management. If she is like her brother, she will be generous in all her relations with you, and save you from making mistakes in your new position. I am earnestly anxious to impress upon you the sacredness of the marriage tie. Under the circumstances of your marriage you will have to change all the habits which have ruled your life hitherto. Until now the duty of your state of life has been that of a humble and obedient child, with simple tastes ; for in so large a family it was necessary to study the habit of doing without all that was merely pretty or pleasant—for not only was my family large, but my means were limited.

"Your mother and I have always endeavoured to include our children in any little scheme, relaxation, and pleasure that was compatible with our fortune ; but these have been comparatively rare. How different will be the life now opening before you ! For, Dulce, you will be very rich ; your station is to be not only among the great, but, from Mr. Mallerdean's position in Parliament, you will be thrown among the wise, the rulers of this our great and flourishing kingdom. He has been carefully educated for this purpose, namely, to form one of the counsellors of the king. It does not belong to human nature to stand still. It either progresses or retrogrades. We may safely venture to predict that Mr. Mallerdean will go on in the pure and exalted path of patriotism, until he has gained an uppermost place in the minds of his countrymen. It will be your business to keep pace with him, to cultivate yourself so as to continue to be a companion for him.

"The ordeal will doubtless be a trial to you. Much as I love my children, I am not blind to their faults. There is a liveliness about you that sometimes borders on recklessness. In our home circle you may indulge this spirit without much rebuke, but in the arena you are about to enter you will be exposed to many temptations, of which, at present, you have never heard the names. Thoughtlessness may plunge you into difficulties, the effects of which may last you all your life. This is that discipline which is to keep us humble, for when we suffer, if we are just we can generally trace it to ourselves. But persons in a high position ought to be especially careful, for their faults do not affect themselves alone, but affect others in proportion as their influence is extended.

"You will be plunged at once into all the exciting pleasures of the world ; and I grieve to think that this is neither a moral nor religious age, nor is it remarkable for taste in literature or art. There will be

no other restraint upon you but your husband's wishes, and your own good sense.

"I have no doubt that love for him will rule your thoughts, and guide your actions. I judge of this from the love and obedience you have always shown to us; and I have much reliance on your natural good sense to keep a due balance between your duties and your pleasures, and not let the latter swallow up the former. I am not so sanguine as to expect you will be preserved from all mistakes, or, indeed, faults. One thing I would specially impress upon you—when you are rich in this world, do not let your heart grow hard or careless to the necessities of those who are in want. 'Blessed be the man that provideth for the sick and needy; the Lord shall deliver him in time of trouble.' Be circumspect in all things, be moderate, and always pray in your heart for wisdom and guidance from on high; so shall you be kept safe in all your goings, and your footsteps shall not slide; and, my child, above all things, pray for humility. In assuming a high place in the world, always recollect that heaven is higher than earth."

Thus did my father finish his matrimonial homily; and so great was the power of the love new born in my heart, I treasured up all his words, and could have listened for ever, in the desire to make myself worthy of such a dear father, and of being Peter's wife.

Neither the suddenness, nor the power of the love now enslaving my whole being, had taken from me all other love. On the contrary, it seemed to me that I regarded all around and about me with a warmth and an ardour that invested everyone with the halo of my own happiness. From out of mine abundance I longed to make all the world happy with the drops of an elixir of gladness. I could not imagine how it could be possible I should ever be less happy than I was then. I could not think that my sun would ever cease to shine.

He was mine; I was his! In these simple words happiness for ever seemed to be expressed. In one of my letters Peter mentioned that he had been to visit Marblette.

"If I had not met a Dulce, Marblette would have charmed my heart, I think. There is in her, as in you, the same artless manner. She is not so impulsive, though her colour comes and goes as quickly; she is more self-sustained. Her beauty is marvellous. She is like a little Peri. On the whole, I am glad Dudu is 'mine own;' for I dared not have treated the little Peri as a mortal. I must have kept her enshrined in a priceless casket, and looked at her now and then, as a rare treat. She is too ethereal for every-day use!"

As for Marblette, she wrote and told me at once, in the handsomest manner:

"With regard to the name of 'Peter,' I think it is impossible to resist loving it, when one has seen a Peter like your Peter!"

Perhaps she was a little saucy, thus repeating it again and again;



I confined myself to hoping she would marry a Bartholomew, or something of that kind.

Of all the people most gratified by my intended marriage, none appeared so perfectly pleased (excepting myself) as grandmamma.

"The world is so altered, son," I heard her say to my father. "Parents are not now entrusted with the important selection of a husband for their children. The young people look about for themselves which, I must needs say, is a fashion that has neither dignity nor refinement about it. My dear Mr. Courtenaye had never spoken to me, though all the preliminaries of the marriage were arranged. I fully believed my parents when they told me it would be for my happiness to marry the husband of their selection. And you know, son, the only unhappy hour of all my married life was that in which it pleased God to take him from me."

"The world, my dear mother, increases so rapidly, society, and all the rules that govern it, are necessarily changed. In your day the circle in which you moved was easily spanned, and a husband selected from it, even in your childhood. I dare say unhappy marriages were as common then as now. For my part, I am very sensitive by nature; I own I would rather my children should choose their own husbands and wives than trust to me to do it for them."

"You are wrong, my dear son. Love is described as blind. I consider a parent's judgment of the last importance—that is, if they love their children."

And grandmamma bowed to papa, in a stately way, which was her mode of showing she was offended.

"I agree with you, where the parent has reason to doubt the morals or respectability of the person selected. In this case, his authority as parent ought to be enforced. All I deprecate is, the task thrust upon me of going out into the world and letting the world know I have ten little daughters for whom I want suitable husbands."

"Eight, my dear son; only eight now."

"Eight is quite enough to alarm me; I shall bide at home, and suffer the husbands to come and seek them."

"Well," murmured dear grandmamma, "they cannot all expect to marry. In our day we took care to seek partners of a corresponding proportion of wealth. My grandchildren will scarcely marry into their station if they wait for that. They cannot all expect Dulce's good fortune."

"I am not ambitious for them. In a family like mine, I think it best to inculcate good principles, and encourage simple habits. Everything else I leave in the hands of God."

Finding that she could make little impression on her son, grandmamma gave me long and serious lectures upon matrimony, the usefulness of which was of so dubious a kind, I paid but little heed to them.

The ceremony, the set rules, the dull decorum of grandmamma's

pictures of blissful married life, were so unlike the visions fitting through my excited brain, that I had much ado to prevent myself laughing. Indeed, when Marblette came home, and became, as was expected, my dearest, most patient, most earnest confidant, we amused ourselves not a little in enacting the parts of the lovers of grandmamma's day. Marblette, with great wickedness, insisted upon rehearsing a scene of our times, wherein she mimicked me, first with one lover, then the faithful Tom, and lastly, with that disagreeable cousin Robert, until I almost felt inclined to think grandmamma's patterns of propriety and dulness were much more loveable.

But what a confidant she was! She repeated the name of Peter until I entreated her not to tire herself. Together, without knowing it, we became perfect metaphysicians in the art of love, so much did we chatter, discourse, and meditate upon its various phases.

One thing alone was wanting to complete my happiness—I desired that Sissy and I should be married on the same day.

"I shall feel so much more comfortable," I whispered entreatingly.

"Yes," said Marblette, "you will then share with her the honours and ovations of the day. She need not be so careful of her demeanour and manners, inasmuch as we shall have you to criticise as well as herself."

Sissy was much disturbed at this flippant speech of Marblette's. Under no circumstances could she imagine that we should need criticism; there was but one mode of acting on such an occasion.

"I know it not," I again whispered coaxingly; "you will be my guide, Sissy."

Sissy blushed a little blush. Her duty as elder sister prompted her to say "yes." So when grandmamma joined her entreaties to mine, and moreover brought in duty again, Sissy gave way at once. Philip was good enough to care nothing about the reasons; nor did he seem to see, in the same strong light as grandmamma and Sissy, the necessity to set me a good example.

"As long as she will marry me as soon as possible (I am ready to-morrow), I don't care what are her reasons, or for whose good she does it. I consider I am the gainer, and no one else."

Grandmamma gave as another reason, one that had vast weight with Sissy, and this was the great improvement in her own health. She felt better than she had done for years. Why, she could not tell. Old as she was, it surprised Marblette and me that grandmamma had not yet learnt that the best of all physics is a little excitement. She was as gay as any of us over the preparations for the two marriages.

Sissy was little flurried at having so short a time to prepare. Naturally so sedate, she did not like to spend the important period just before she was about to utter such solemn vows, in buying, choosing, fitting on, and preparing her wedding clothes. Though, as Marblette said to me severely (that is, as one rosebud might bob against another)—

"She is far better than someone I could name, who is either watching for the postman, and then spending the whole day in corners, behind doors, under bushes, reading a state paper, I suppose, from the House of Commons ; or, now that another somebody is at Oram Castle, is always at the nursery window, as if she was baby, peeping out down the street, and when she does see someone coming, hiding herself and obliging me to go through the farce of seeking for her, and bringing her down. I shall tell Peter next time that you are always on the watch, and know sooner than any of us that he is in the house ; though apparently the latest, and most reluctant to meet him."

"No, don't, Marblette—please don't !"

"Then will you be reasonable and good, and take a more praiseworthy interest in your wedding garments ?"

"I marked some handkerchiefs yesterday."

"Yes, with the name of Peter. The children are now unpicking them, and remarking them. I have been obliged to bribe them to do it, by the fun of employing their own hair instead of silk."

"Dear little things, how I shall prize them !"

"Do you know what you are going to be married in ? I trow not."

"Yes, the same as Sissy."

"And what is Sissy's dress ?"

"White spotted silk, and a white satin bonnet with a blonde veil."

"Come, you are not so love-lost as I thought. I must tell grandmamma ; for at present, while she admires Sissy's sober and even temperament, she bewails over you as one not in her senses."

But nature revenged herself upon Sissy. The day before our marriage she was in hysterics almost all the evening in grandmamma's room, and would not have cared had she seen all the wedding finery on the fire, blazing ! As for Philip, she could not bear him in her sight. But for me, I found myself doing what I had never done before, nestling up to him who was so soon to be my husband, and looking at him now and then with sad, somewhat wistful eyes ; which I am sure said, "Do you repent ?—there is time. Do not let me repent, it would kill me !" An indescribable awe possessed me, under the influence of which, when he bid me good night, I laid my head on his breast. I felt his heart bound ; he lifted up my face, and said, "Kiss me, my darling." And so I did, for the first time. Was I his darling, ever more to be ? I believe this was now an absolute necessity to my happiness and peace of mind. And this belief that it was so, made the next day, usually so irksome from fuss and ceremony, a day of peaceful content. Only when I felt Marblette's wet cheek against mine, a sudden trembling seized me. I shook "very exceedingly," with a sort of terror. Would the new love bear with me, my faults, my follies, waywardnesses, as had done the loves of my childhood ? Papa's

voice soothed this tremor. He was saying to him who was now my husband—

“So docile and loving a child will make a tender and obedient wife. I trust you with a great charge, her happiness, for I know it rests with you only to make her life blessed or miserable.”

Dear Sissy was not going to be so completely separated from them as I was ; and altogether her marriage had been a settled thing for so long, that, as the servants said, “’Twas a marcy we hae got you married at all, Miss !” Everybody but herself regarded it in a comfortable and prosaic sort of view. She had cried so much that her nose and eyes were quite red—which grieved grandmamma. But Philip consoled her by saying “I do not marry Sissy for her nose—it will be something for me to do to get it back to its proper colour.” Philip certainly was just the sort of man to suit, not Sissy exactly, but her ways. He was altogether made up of a lively sagaciousness, that caused him to look upon life with a determined air of good-humour and philosophy. He was not a person to go into extremes about anything, but he covered a rectitude of mind and a strong will under a gaiety of heart. He was just the sort of person to take charge of a sensitive conscience. The marriage ceremony, in making them one, turned Sissy into a Philipina—without making Philip the least bit of a Sissy. It is the nature of some men to love women of yielding natures. Their prerogative of lord is not to be worn by them as useless. They enlarge the word “cherish” into all the synonymes attached to “guide” and “educate.” This, if done good-humouredly, assures happiness. The man makes his wife’s mind suit his.

But, as I said before, Sissy was not going to be entirely separated from her family. She and Philip were to be absent for a week, and then meet grandmamma at Alverstone, and begin the life they always meant to lead.

I, on the contrary, was to leave everyone for an indefinite time, and go away alone with the husband of whom I knew so little—in whom I put such trust.

Certainly we were going to what was to be evermore my home. After a brief stay there, just, as Peter said, to introduce me to the county, we were to take up our abode in London for the season.

Peter had asked for Marblette to join me there. But my father said, “No, let Dulce get accustomed to her new life—let her make herself happy with her new relations—let her feel that she has you only to depend on for advice or comfort—then afterwards we will make her remember the time when she loved no one but us.”

(Ah ! papa, your decision might be wise—but it was cruel at the time.)

The first six months after my marriage banished for a while all that over-liveliness so often rebuked at home.

After all excitement there is reaction. From the first moment of

meeting my husband until now that I was married to him, it appeared as if I had neither thought nor remembered anything else, but that I was so blest as to be chosen his wife.

Without any difference between the lover and the husband, excepting the greater love of the latter, a painful sort of fear and distaste to matrimony overwhelmed me. Not all my love for Peter, which amounted to a sort of idolatry, reconciled me to my new life. I felt as if a mental earthquake had wholly upset the structure of my mind, casting by for ever the treasured memories of childhood and youth, all arranged and in sweetest order—substituting for them a conglomerated mass of new duties, new thoughts, and new habits, that were not only all in dire confusion, but wholly without the charm that would induce me to arrange them.

At times I longed to pick out a cotton dress and straw bonnet, and, leaving a letter for Peter, just run home, fly into my own room, lock myself up with Marblette, and ask her to make me again what I was before I left her.

Fortunately that spirit of submission—or rather content, so absolute in our first home, kept my impulsiveness in check. I argued that I was married—it was unfortunate, but irremediable. But—I loved Peter, that was fortunate—and also reassuring.

He promised daily to make me happy—and not a day passed that he did not fulfil every idle wish I had. Had I not a beautiful horse all my own? I rode every day—and every time felt the same exhilaration as on that first ride at Oram. Also I had a carriage, nay, half a dozen, one of which, a little pony carriage, was my very own, and I was learning to drive two little ponies.

And then my house!—so grand—and the stately life I led! I had servants to pick up my handkerchief, my gloves. Unlike ours at home, who gave me little courtesy but the “Miss” before my name, these, my new ones, bowed to the very ground, and treated me with the obsequiousness of slaves salaaming a queen.

I seemed never in anyone’s way—wherever I went my presence appeared a gratification; whatever I said was esteemed as wisdom. If I worked, everybody admired, though it was only hemming, and wished to do the like. If I did nothing, everybody said how delightful it was to sit with one’s hands before one. If I walked, walking was the only healthy exercise. If I rode, riding was the only way in which a lady ought to take the air. If I drove, a carriage was the proper and most correct, and, indeed, only way in which Mrs. Mallerdean should be seen out of her own house.

Mrs. Mallerdean! I began to be sick at the repetition of the name, and to separate her interests from mine. I looked upon this Mrs. Mallerdean, who could neither eat, drink, nor go out without a running chorus of laudatory remarks, as a person wholly antagonistic to me; a person for whom I had no respect, suffering such adulation. She was

that Mrs. Mallerdean whom I had created in my mind's eye at Oram Castle. As for being me, or anything like me, or connected with me, I could not bear it.

I was eminently unfitted for a fine lady !

In addition to these troubles (if they could be thus called), on my first arrival at Mallerdean, with the first awe that so grand a place was now mine, that all those rows of servants were my servants, that I had only to ask, to have, to nod, and be obeyed, came one stinging disappointment.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### SHADOWS.



HAD been married to Peter only three days when we arrived at Mallerdean, and I was thinking, in the midst of all the tumult and triumphs of our arrival, of the happiness of being with a sister at last.

So long beneficently gifted with sisters, now, when I wanted one more than ever, in default of having none of my own, I turned with longing towards the sister of my husband.

She stood there, at the end of the avenue of folks who welcomed us, with a man near her, whom I supposed was her husband. I understood at the first glance that I might banish a thought I had entertained, that I must give her the place in my heart sacred to Marblette. She was my husband's sister, but she never meant to be mine. Her coldness, and, indeed, haughtiness, was so far beneficial that it restrained my impulsiveness. She curtsied to me, and I curtsied to her.

She was a pretty woman—fair and delicate, with eyes of a blue that never changed in colour. No emotion made them darken or dilate. They were coldly blue, and only sparkled when angry. She was very much wrapped up in rich furs and embroidered cashmere, for her youngest baby was not more than six weeks old. This had been her reason for not attending our wedding. The gentleman standing near her was a Captain Moffat. Sir Brough, her husband, appeared about an hour after our arrival. There was a great deal of etiquette and useless ceremony in those days, and I was beginning to be weary of sitting there, in my travelling things, being introduced every few moments to some new person, and going through the same form of question and answer, and routine of congratulations.

At last I requested to be shown to my room.

"Certainly, Mrs. Mallerdean," answered Lady Lanton. "I waited your pleasure to move."

I don't think she did ; but at all events, if she meant to stand upon ceremony with me, I thought it just as well to take advantage of her

mood, and have my own way. Her politeness could not refuse any request. So I begged to be left alone, and introduced to no more people, and comforted myself with a great cry. That is how I spent part of my first evening at home. But my tears and woe soon fled before Peter's goodness to me, He welcomed me home (when we were once more alone) with a love and happiness that made amends for everything.

"You must excuse my sister," he said; "she is cold, more by education than heart. We have had no advantages of domestic life, only each other to love, and there has even been a formality in that; and Sir Brough, though a worthy gentleman, has not so much character as my sister. She rules him, spite of vows and promises, and in their case it is best so."

"She never had a sister," I remarked, as he paused.

"No; but now that I have given her one, who so well understands the domestic love which makes this life so happy, I augur a great change in her—a change that will materially increase her happiness. Courtesy and formality are necessary at times to prevent us recurring to the modes of savages, but they may be carried too far."

"I always thought them very dull things," sighed I.

"It is astonishing how soon one becomes accustomed to them," answered my husband.

And it seemed to me that, once more at home, subjected to all the ceremonies belonging to that home, influenced by his sister—for I saw that, unknown to himself, she had an influence—Peter, my Peter, was as cold and haughty outwardly as herself. His servants obeyed his looks or signs—it seemed as if neither he nor Lady Lanton could speak to them, it was beneath their dignity. At the same time, I could easily see he was beloved. They watched his looks as if anxious to anticipate them—they obeyed her imperative signs as if from compulsion.

As soon as there could be no affinity between me (hitherto that sort of child in her father's house which the Bible describes as servant) and all this ceremony, I was some time before I could understand it, and therefore endured the mortifying position of trying to find my place in the house. It was very well defined in my father's house—the general carrier of messages, letters, and parcels—the everlasting doer of all the odd work of a numerous household—the willing promoter of all liveliness—the right hand of everybody who wanted a right hand. Happy as it had made me to run after and save grandmamma's minutes, the knowledge that I was not only useful but beloved, and would be certainly sorely missed in my father's house, made my days at home one continual sunshine of pleasure.

Here, at Mallerdean, instead of being useful, doing everything for every-body, finding the days too short, the hours minutes, and everything just touched with that energy which pervades a numerous household, here, at Mallerdean, I was set up as an idol to be worshipped, fully

conscious that the prominence of the position was owing to nothing in me, and that, when tired of spending their homage on me, they would elect for themselves another idol.

Yet this was not so bad as that I felt as bewildered and scared as when a child, walking over the Newcastle bridge to school, stunned with sights and noises foreign to my ear. Captain Moffat talked to me of fashionable life, in a jargon that was Greek to me. Sir Brough was equally unsuccessful in trying to amuse me with his style, while Lady Lanton and my husband talked to each other of things and people I had never heard of. Thus, except when alone with Peter, I was in reality cut off from all communication with any one, and puzzled and wearied myself with endeavours to make myself understand what everything meant.

I did not write home and say I was dull, because they could not have understood why I was so ; but I talked to my little sister, who had gone to heaven, and left me her duties to do. And I told her that I should like to be in her place, but even if there, I should still wish that he who was now my husband should be some great archangel, whom I could love and obey with the fervour I desired to do here. It seems to me, at this distant date, that I could not have been really miserable, for in all my complainings the prospect of a separation from Peter, to escape my woes, never occurred to me. I think I may trace all my miseries to mortification. I was nothing at present in this great grand house but the owner's "pretty toy !"

It was but seldom Peter indulged in any fondness for his wife before other eyes than our own ; but, no one being in the room one day, he began pulling down my hair, and folding it over his great fingers into curls ; Lady Lanton coming in he did not desist, though evidently she was shocked.

"You seem delighted with your new toy," she exclaimed.

"Yes," he answered, slowly shaking out another curl, and looking at the sunshine through it. "Yes, and no wonder. I do not know who has so pretty a toy."

"Don't make her conceited, or she will lose the charm for which people praise her."

"That little dash of simplicity, which was, indeed, the thing for which I loved her?"

"Do not fear, Peter, I will not lose it ; but I like to be praised."

"So do we all, pretty one, though all are not so frank in acknowledging it as you are."

"It is her frankness that pains me, Mallerdean" (Lady Lanton always called her brother by his surname), "it sometimes borders on downright simplicity."

In other words, Lady Lanton meant simpleton. At that period her appreciation of me was just, though mortifying. I felt she was right, and that she would be right until I could throw off my present ignorance of the world and all its ways. Had I only her to please, perhaps



I should have spared myself the trouble and heartaches, but love was all-powerful. To make myself something better in Peter's eyes than his "pretty toy," became the business of my life. Love was about to teach me my woman's duty of faith, patience—a wife's prerogative—her hopes, her aspirations.

That very evening I began.

A day had been appointed for me to be introduced to the Mallerdean tenantry, and this was the day. I assumed an air of confidence I was very far from feeling, though the colour that came and went with such rapidity might have betrayed me. There were upwards of eighty present, and I was expected to say a few words to them all. To do this required some natural wit, so that I might not say the same thing to all. I therefore managed so as to include half-a-dozen in one sentence, and succeeded so well in this (I was partly indebted to going with my father among his parishioners for the power) as to cause Peter to smile with pleasure. Finally, I took the hand of one very old man, who had been mentioned to me as not only the oldest tenant, but the most respected on the estate, and made him sit down.

Retaining my hand in his, after obeying me, he said :

"Excuse an ould man, lady, but my eyes are none so dim but that I see thou'rt as sweet-luiking as thou'rt bonny. We wor a-most feared as Squire wadn't gie us a landlady at all, but he hae waited to a purpose. I bless God I hae lived to see her, and I dinna know, friends, if, in a' my lang life, I ever seed a purtier face. Ay, Squire, be she harf as guid as she be purty, thou'rt a locky man !"

"Well, Doune, if you will keep the secret, I must tell you that every day I find she is more good than pretty."

"Then thou'd best pray the Lord to gie ye as mony years to live as in His guidness he hae given me, and then, I'se warrant, thou'lt be loth to go. Thou'lt think thou'rt in heaven all thee life, Squire."

My husband was touched with the idea, and taking my hand, kissed it before them all. Then, calling for wine, he bade them drink my health.

"But for Mr. Doune," he said, "bring Curaçoa, that is a liquor he loves."

"Ay, so I does, Squire—he be roightly neamed Cure-us-all. He do warm my old bones wi' a pratty heat, and is joost the vary drink for sooch a health. I warrant the vary soight o' the lady's face wad cure us o' all ills, be they what they may."

"A pretty compliment, Doune—but what's the matter ?"

I defined his dismay.

"Ay, the lady do see. I should be a-swallowing glass and all, Squire, it be that delicate, ye see ; I be used to toomblers, I be. Now this is soomat loike," he added, as I handed him a bumper of Curaçoa in a large wine-glass. "Now, then, let's gie the leddy a cheer."

And raising his cracked old voice, all the rest responded to Doune by a noise that nearly deafened me.

"Again! again! again!"

Then Peter waved his hand, and they stopped. He asked me if I could thank them myself; so, in obedience to the spirit that prompted me to show myself something better than a "pretty toy," I took hold of his hand to give me assurance, and, something breathless, I spoke thus:

"My good friends, you have a landlord whom I see you love, and who I know loves you. He will teach me to be a worthy landlady. If I please him, I know I shall please you. What more can I say? Only this—I hope we may all live as long as Mr. Doune, and all be able to say, at eighty years of age, that the paradise we have made on earth—helping and assisting each other—may fit us for the paradise we are promised in heaven. Your healths all, good friends!"

In describing this scene in my home letter, of course I gave them this, my first essay at public speaking, in full.

In his answer my father said:

"No compliment that was paid you pleased me half so much as perceiving, which I do by your speech, that you blend your earthly duties with your heavenly ones. Go on in the same course—be not moved with one without thinking of the other, and I feel sure you will prove a blessing to the circle in which you move. England requires a stirring of the spirit. The very simplicity of our religious duties has caused a supineness to creep through the land that milderews every other feeling. It is in the power of great families, like the one you have just entered, to shine like a bright beacon, that the weak, the indifferent, the lukewarm, nay, even the wicked, may turn and behold, and, in beholding, repent."

Though I was so successful in my speech, I made many mistakes of a kind that fretted Lady Lanton, even if they did not annoy Peter.

It seemed as if I liked those visitors most whom it was more convenient I should care nothing about, while I neglected others it was of much consequence to please.

Politics in those days divided even the same families with a wall of separation that no affection could break through. Besides this barrier to the sociability of the county, the Mallerdeans seemed to be allowed to select those whom they wished to visit on equal terms, without the slightest impeachment on their courtesy.

Accustomed to seeing my father treated with much consideration, I was prepared to act towards the rector of the parish of Mallerdean with deference and cordiality. He was a tall and handsome man, with singularly fine and picturesque hair. He was scarcely thirty years old, and demanded, from his gentlemanly appearance and refined manners, much admiration. Though a clergyman, he gave

himself airs as if a grandee, and was, as far as I could judge, clever and well informed.

My surprise was great at perceiving that Peter was a little supercilious to him, Lady Lanton almost rude. This, my husband explained to me, a little at a time (for the Mallerdeans were sensitively proud in any secret that regarded themselves), arose, in the first place, because of his family. His father had made some money in the tea-trade, and having married a foreign lady, and become the father of this handsome boy, he had spent part of his money in making him a scholar and a gentleman.

Some service done by the tea-merchant to a nobleman in the county had been rewarded by the promise of a living to the son; and his appearance being so prepossessing, he had gradually risen in the esteem of every one, until he gained the best position a clergyman could hold in the county, namely, to be rector of Mallerdean, and—Peter scarcely liked to own it even to me, but the rector had brought himself into everlasting disgrace at Mallerdean, by actually proposing for the hand of Miss Mallerdean!—a piece of presumption she never forgave, and which her brother always resented.

Clergymen were not much thought of in those days. I own that, spite of his imposing airs and his handsome exterior, I was ashamed of the littleness that caused him to submit to the indignities thrust on him by Lady Lanton, and which made him blind to the coolness shown to him by my husband. All he appeared to desire was to be on any terms they chose, so that he was not forbidden the house. I could have forgiven this in the apothecary or lawyer, but it grieved me in one holding his sacred office.

Before I go further in the history of my life, 'tis as well I should say somewhat more of Lady Lanton, lest, in the description thereof, I may be thought prejudiced or ill-natured.

I have told how she met me, the three days old wife of her only brother. From the rule adopted that first day she never diverged, except to grow colder and more severe—at last an enemy. But that I may not let it be thought I roused these evil passions within her, I must prove that, after herself, she loved but one other thing in the world, and that was her brother.

To begin with her feelings as a mother. I knew she had a child—yet no one spoke of it—I never saw it—or heard the least allusion made to it by any one.

About a fortnight after I had arrived at my new home, in utter idleness and ennui, I took it into my head to wander all over this my great house. Peter had ridden over to the neighbouring town, of which he was the member, to do some electioneering business. I was to ride to meet him at a certain hour. That wished-for hour was still a long way off—so, as I said, I took a ramble for the first time through the house.

After going through various rooms, I came to a large old-fashioned

door. Opening it, I entered a narrow stone passage, and as I went along it seemed to me that this part of the house was much older than that in which we lived. I looked into one or two rooms, all with stone floors, nicely sanded—with bright polished furniture, all heavy and antique. They were cold and desolate, as if never inhabited. The grates were bright, and decorated with old-fashioned flowers of cut paper. At last I came to one where the flickering light of a fire glowing upon the old polished oaken door prepared me to see something different. It was with a flush of pleasure, as well as surprise, that I saw within this room all the well-known litter of a nursery. There were little chairs—the remains of a children's dinner—a small hat—a broken whip—and a toy or two of a worn-out and battered appearance. The floor of the room was still of stone, but, instead of being sanded, strips of coarse matting, with an old rug or two, covered it here and there. There was a little saucepan on the hob of the grate, which I readily imagined contained pap.

I stood for a moment wondering—where were the children that used this room? and whose could they be? As if to answer me, a small voice from out of some corner or cupboard, or outside the window, said—

"I wis I was Mother Hubbard's dog."

"Where are you?" I asked, unable to discover the owner of this wish.

The door of a closet opened, as if of itself. On the topmost shelf I saw an odd little boy, of about five years of age, sitting with a picture book on his knee. He had opened the closet door with a kick of his foot, on hearing my voice.

He was a pale, ugly-looking child, and had on a tight suit of nankin clothes, that seemed all in one piece; short sleeves, that showed a very sunburnt pair of arms, and square cut round the chest, making his mahogany-coloured neck and shoulders in strange contrast to his white face.

"Who are you?" I asked, forgetting his ugliness and oddity in compassion for the pitiful look of unhappiness in his face.

"I am Master," he answered.

"And why do you sit there?"

"Rumm said I was naughty."

"Were you naughty?"

"Much as usual. I am naughty or not, as suits Rumm."

"Let me take you down."

"I shall be much obliged."

In accomplishing this feat, I discovered he must be must be seven or eight years old, and that a certain lisping in his speech arose from the loss of his front teeth.

"Why did you wish to be Mother Hubbard's dog?"

"She was kind to him, and every day went to get him something."

"Well, I am Mother Hubbard—what shall I get for you?"

He looked at me, and then at the picture of Mother Hubbard in his book. After which he said,

"I suppose the Mother Hubbards of boys are different to the Mother Hubbards of dogs."

"I hope so."

"Please to sit down."

In spite of his plainness, and the oddity of his appearance in his tight nankin dress, there was a singular politeness and old-fashioned courtesy in his manner. He handed me a chair with quite a grace, though he still held the amiable history of Mother Hubbard open in the other hand. He then gently touched my hair, my dress, and, taking up one of my hands, he examined the rings, never losing the place in his book.

"What is Mother Hubbard to do for you to-day?" I asked at last.

"I want a coat and breeches, buckles and shoes."

It seemed as if he had the most perfect faith that I should procure them for him at once.

I was about to prepare him for his Mother Hubbard not being so expeditious as the dog's, when a servant entered with a little baby in her arms. She seemed much surprised to see me, still more so when I ran and took the baby in my arms. Dear little thing, how it reminded me of the numerous babies at home.

"Master, you haven't been a-making a nise," she whispered angrily to the boy.

"No, Mother Hubbard came of her own accord."

"I invaded your nurseries because I had a fancy to see the house. Are these Lady Lanton's children?"

"Yes, my lady, the eldest and youngest. Master Bobby is in bed."

Three children in the house, and I wholly ignorant thereof! How strange it seemed!

"I must go and see him; I am very fond of children."

The nurse looked pleased.

"Mother Hubbard, if you go, bring me back my coat, breeches, and buckles."

"For shame, Master, how dare you speak? You must excuse him, my lady. He have no manners, and never sees no one to teach him manners."

"I think Master has very good manners; he has been very polite to me—but have you no other name?"

"Papa calls me Buff when he speaks to me, and Bobby calls me Buffy."

"So shall I; come with me and show me Bob, as you call him, and the rest of the house."

Nothing loth, the young hero in nankin tights proceeded, with as much alacrity as these garments would permit, to take me through the rooms appropriated to the use of Lady Lanton's children.

Bobby was a fine, rosy-cheeked fellow, of four years' growth, sleeping soundly in a dewy state of heat.

"I suppose mamma comes to see you every day," I observed, by way of nothing.

"Who is mamma?"

"Lady Lanton."

"Oh! my lady, I have not seen her this month; she ordered back my new coat, breeches, and buckles, she did! I don't want to see her again!"

"So there are just you three boys?" I said, by way of turning the subject.

"Yes, and I wish I was one of those never born. My lady does not like having children—she says it is not fashionable, and so they are smothered."

Putting this extraordinary assertion down to some foolish remark of the nurse's, I reverted to the clothes he was so anxious to obtain.

"Yes; they were ordered. I had them on when my lady chanced to come in, and said they were much too old for me. I must continue to wear this."

And he contemptuously pointed to the wretched nankin suit.

"And did papa agree?"

"Papa!—no! I couldn't expect it either—he isn't much of a gentleman."

Of all the odd children I had ever met, this was about the most quaint.

"Good-bye, Buffy. I must ride off in search of the clothes."

"Good-bye, Mother Hubbard—I will be very patient."

And the pitiful look of resignation, so painful to see in a child, once more settled on his face, as he sat down on a wooden stool, placing one foot on his knee, while he re-opened the history of Mother Hubbard at that particular page where she is bringing her beloved dog a suit of clothes.

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## CHAPTER XIX.

### INCIDENTS.



ORDERED my horse rather sooner, and rode a good pace to the town. I told Peter my little tale, and he agreed with me—Mother Hubbard must keep her promise. He kindly went himself to the tailor who was likely to have made the rejected suit of clothes, and found that our hopes were verified. It had been laid by, waiting Lady Lanton's pleasure as to when it would suit her to think her son might wear it. Peter ordered it to be sent home, and we followed leisurely.

As we rode along, I explained to Peter how odd I thought it that there should be children in the house, and no one seemed interested about them.

"Oh, yes!—we are!" he answered; "in fact, my sister is extremely particular. Formerly, as soon as a child was born, it was given to the care of a countrywoman, who took it away with her into the country, and never was seen by its parents for a year or two, according to its health. Now, my sister, not having been sent out to nurse herself (neither was I, owing to some scruples of our mother), determined that no inconvenience should tempt her to part with her children from under her own roof. I applauded her feeling, though I might question the wisdom of it!"

"The wisdom! Nay—take a lesson from the birds and beasts. They guard and foster their young until instinct tells them they can take care of themselves."

"That is true, Dulce—I have not thought of it in that light before. In fact, we have seen so little of children, we are not fitted to have much to do with them. I will go with you this evening, and see my nephews. My sister always speaks of the eldest as if he was something of a misfortune to the family."

"He is a plain boy, but I feel sure he will look much better in this longed-for suit of clothes; and as for his sense, I am afraid he is, if anything, too clever."

One comfort ensued to me from this discovery of Lady Lanton's feelings towards her children. I ceased to wonder at or lament for those expressed towards myself. She had no heart, so it was useless to torment myself with trying to find the way into it. Her only remark upon hearing that I had made the acquaintance of her children, and was disposed to make much of them, rather displeased Peter.

"I certainly see no objection to the intimacy. Children generally seek each other's company."

She felt that she had made a slip, for she saw his sudden flush of anger, while he seemed meditating a reproof to her for the first time. I thought it best still to keep that word yet unspoken, and answered for myself:

"Very true; my father always said I was a good child with children—a good walking companion with him—and what sort of a wife do you think, Peter?"

Oblivious to Lady Lanton's presence, and the shock to her sense of decorum, I ventured to pull his whiskers, and asked him the question with one of those subtle looks of affection that only a wife can give.

This turned away his displeasure at his sister's speech; for Peter, never having experienced the delights of a little dallying, yet loved it in his heart—doted on anything of the sort. To be sure, I had not as yet indulged him much. Like all young girls, the real depth of my

love was hidden in my heart, hardly known to myself. It showed itself principally in my thoughts, wherein no heroine of famed renown, no wife of any age, no maiden of remotest history, could have done more than I would do for him. There is nothing like the self-devotion and high-mindedness of a young girl in love.

Buffy looked charmingly quaint in his new clothes. The crowning touch was given to his happiness when Mother Hubbard brought him home a pony, on which he was allowed to be her companion when she rode.

"I agree with you," said Peter, one day, "that Buffy is a remarkable boy—in fact, a character. For his age, he has great self-command, and a love of truth that quite makes me respect him. Much as I dislike the fellow, I have engaged Beaume (the rector) to come here every day, and get him on with his Latin grammar."

"I can teach him that," I answered.

"Can you so? Then you are more accomplished than we thought. I shall tell my sister, who was lamenting to me that your education had been neglected."

Lady Lanton was an accomplished musician and linguist. She often spoke to her brother in French, as if neither Sir Brough nor I understood it. Sir Brough's principal characteristic was the love of a good dinner; and Bobby, his second son, inherited the propensity. I think Buffy's estimation of his father was pretty true. A man now-a-days puts on a black coat and white tie, and can look the gentleman, even if nothing else. But in those terrible days, when I first married, embroidered coats, powdered wigs, and diamond buckles had all gone out of fashion, and the most hideous dress, both for ladies and gentlemen, had come into use; and Nature must have done a great deal for either man or woman to look well in it. Sir Brough looked and was intensely vulgar. His prototype may be seen in any picture of the *Beau Monde* published in 1805 or 1806. The dress of ladies was equally inconvenient and unbecoming. I think I owed much of the admiration I excited by the youth and bloom that no dress could disguise, to the habit of always dressing in white. However straight and narrow the dress might be, the folds of white muslin relieved it.

But dress was not the only drawback to those days. Life was not so pleasantly passed as now. We were slaves to certain ceremonies and obsolete customs. The effect of the French Revolution was felt throughout English society. To some it brought enlarged ideas, and a healthy vigour of mind. But it also laid hold on all who were inclined to folly and self-indulgence, and incited them to a wild recklessness that drew multitudes into a fatal maelstrom whence few escaped.

Over society there was a mildew that corrupted manners, taste, and art; it affected even those who most deprecated the contamination. Dress was ugly, and scarcely decent; the rules of society were irksome and ridiculous; our habits inconvenient and unhealthy. Lite-



rature was not respected; architecture, hideous; whilst religion seemed to be set aside or forgotten.

Much has been said of the luxuries and expenditure of the present day. I am inclined to think that every age has its enormities. What is deemed rational at one time, becomes ludicrous and extravagant in another. But when things do come to the worst, such as they were in the eighteenth century, then comes the turning point.

Minds pinioned down by habits, as the body is enclosed down in a vault, once loosened, struggle, as the buried alive might struggle, to force themselves upwards. The re-action once begun, continues, and at least there intervenes a period of comparative improvement, until another reformation becomes necessary.

At the period of which I am writing, it was the custom to introduce a newly-married lady to the county at a public ball, to be followed by a series of entertainments. How a bride ever survived them, is now a matter of wonder to me!

Lady Lanton had her own hairdresser in the house, whose one sole occupation in life was to dress her hair every day. On the occasion of the ball at which I was to make my appearance to the county, Lady Lanton sent her coach to town, to bring down the court hairdresser. Peter was anxious that I should profit by his taste; but after enduring three hours' torture, for which my husband paid ten guineas, he bade me pull it all down and dress it after my own fashion. I remember that I had to stand on a chair to have my dress pulled down, so narrow were the skirts. It was then the fashion to have them as tight as possible—the difficulties of walking were great, but those of sitting down required a special education to surmount.

To return to my first ball.

In those days people danced country dances and cotillons. Quadrilles were unknown. The dancing-master of the neighbourhood always attended, and called out the figures, while he guided his pupils through the mazes of the dances by signs and whispers.

I was to open the ball with Lord Harpendale, who had been guardian to the Mallerdean children. The Lord-Lieutenant—the Marquis of Ardmore—did not dance. He was always in a state of gout; but he requested me to come and sit by him between the dances.

"It is very good of you to look so pleasant," said my partner, "when you have such an old fellow to dance with."

"But I think it such an honour," I replied; "some of these days I must be old myself, and I shall wish to be honoured as you are."

"Ah! my dear, don't talk of growing old with that blooming complexion. I can't bear to think of it."

"I have been taught to love old age."

"It's more than most people here have been, I'll be bound. We are sadly in the way sometimes, we old folks."

"Do not think so, or, at all events, don't say so, because it gives no encouragement to us to try and reach a beneficent old age."

"You must make excuse for me, young lady. We old folks are apt to be splenetic when we see such youth and beauty, and know it is not for us. But Peter is a sort of child of mine. I ought to rejoice for his sake. I am very fond of Peter. I love him as my own son. We adopted him and his sister as county children, when they were left such young orphans; but somehow, my wife, Lady Harpendale, has not taken to Emma as I have taken to Peter."

"She is quite a different sort of character."

"Just so—Peter has a warm heart. Underneath that grave air he has the warmest heart. And then he is so clever. I always said to Lady Harpendale, when there were rumours of his marrying, which made us all anxious—'Trust to Peter, he is sure to select a sensible wife.'"

"I am going to be sensible as soon as possible."

"Well, well, that of course—some of these days. You are very young; and we must not expect such a pretty creature to be wise too. We were afraid, at one time—sadly afraid of Peter's marrying one whom we could not quite approve—a lovely young woman—no fault there, but she had a manner. There was—what shall I say?—well, let us call it a want of womanly reserve, that did not please us. 'No,' said Lady Harpendale, 'no, she will not do. I won't give up my place as Queen of the County to one whom, at times, I should like to whip.' That's what Lady Harpendale said; and, my dear young lady, she was right. That beautiful creature wanted whipping. Fortunately, Peter found her out. The women of England are considered 'prim,' but, in God's name, let us have primness rather than that they should so act as to make us wish them to be whipped."

"I will take great care to be prim," I answered, laughing.

"Yes, do, my dear—though you don't look as if you would ever do anything to deserve whipping, like that other beautiful creature. You have a pretty, modest air, and are kind to such an old fellow as I am. We were so anxious to see you. Lady Harpendale said—'For twenty-nine years I have been Queen of the County—I will look at Peter Mallerdean's wife, and if she is worthy, I will crown her Queen this very night in my place.'"

"Have all counties Queens?"

"I know not—but we have, and we like it."

"And what are her duties?"

"She must be at the head, possibly the inventor and promoter of all the good deeds done in the county; she must be ready to patronise every public meeting; she must set the fashions; adjust quarrels, and be the guide and star of the whole female population."

"The only arduous part of the duties is adjusting the quarrels."

"Ah! you are sanguine! Don't be so sanguine. It requires some one very superior to be Queen of this County. We are not easily pleased. The young people of the present day are very fast, my dear Mrs. Mallerdean. We must have a stately Queen of the County to

restrain them. They hurry upon their fathers and mothers so rapidly, that, egad ! they almost trip us up !”

And as he said these words, this fate nearly occurred to him. Dancing was no light feat in those days. Old and young danced with a vigour and spirit, and did their “steps” with a precision that would amaze the present generation. Such cutting and capering among the gentlemen, such pirouetting and chasséeing among the ladies, made the art of dancing quite a labour.

Thus, my partner, burdened with the accumulated plumpness of sixty years, and a rosiness of visage that became purple on exertion, was almost breathless with his exertions. Having gained the reputation of being the best dancer of his time, he was anxious to keep it. So he did his steps with the utmost neatness, taking every opportunity to introduce a double cut, or *entre-chat*. He was in the act of doing one of these when some one from behind accidentally pushed against him at the moment most perilous to his equilibrium. We had nearly a catastrophe, and though Lord Harpendale saved his person, his temper was upset, and his growls against the rising generation were loud and deep as he conveyed me to the side of the Lord-Lieutenant.

Here I could have remained with great pleasure half the evening, for he talked of no one but Peter.

“He is,” said he, “just the man we want. He is loved as well as respected by the aristocracy of this county, while he is still more admired and liked by the squirearchy. And as for “*hoi polloi*,” they adore him. You see, we all know he is a man of his word. He does not promise more to me than he does to the meanest of his constituents. He is perfectly frank with both high and low, and will give us his mind whether palatable or not. He acts upon us, indolent, half-educated, somewhat-spoilt aristocrats, as good wine acts upon an enfeebled frame. He stirs us up, and warms us into activity, whilst his own energy and industry are a lesson to all beneath him. If, in spite of wealth, of independence, of a fondness for literature, and other beguiling pleasures, he is ready to work, and work hard for the good of the county, nay, for an individual, he merits our warmest esteem and confidence. His example is invaluable. Naturally, we felt anxious about his marriage. At one time we had a fear, but we ought to have known him better—Peter Mallerdean would not put in his excellent mother’s place a lady of whom we should not be proud. And yet we heard sad tales of you.”

“Did you? Let me hope that it was because I was worth talking about.”

“Certainly. It might be envy—we will put it down to that. My good friend, Lord Oram, who spends part of the year in the neighbouring county, he gave us the first news. But his letters are generally nothing but heads of chapters strongly endorsed with——”

“Yes—I can guess. While he announced his news, he probably

sent Peter and me and himself all to —, where we none of us wish to go."

"Too true—so of course we could not rely upon his report. My wife called upon Lady Lanton, and found her very low about it. She had heard you were nothing but a little dot of a girl, still in pinafores, and relishing thick bread and butter, essentially countrified, and, oh ! fearful fact ! with nineteen little sisters to help you. We might have forgiven the youth, the pinafores, even the bread and butter, but the nineteen little sisters was more than we could manage to forgive. Said we to each other, we shall be overrun with the lanky daughters of this north-country parson, who, because one of them has made a great match, will expect all the others to do the same. Then we pitied Lady Lanton. We considered Peter a lost, misguided man—bewitched by a red-haired, large-boned, bread and butter-eating north-country sorceress. And now, see how we tormented ourselves for nothing ! We have all been shaking hands with and congratulating each other ever since you came into the ball-room. We look upon ourselves as the most envied of all counties, and on Peter as the most fortunate of all his sex. We are inclined to send for the north-country parson out of hand, and bargaining for his nineteen other little daughters to marry our sons, or else to make him settle, *volens volens*, in our county, that none of them may escape us. We are alarmed lest the neighbours should hear of these Phoenixes, and snap them all up before we have a chance."

All this made me laugh. I enjoyed the ball very much. But, as I also enjoyed my rides with Buffy, quaintest and cleverest of boys, I thought I could safely write to my father that vanity was not intoxicating me.

And yet, if I had only told of Peter's conduct—that wise, erudite, stern patriot—all the nonsense he said to his wife about that ball—all the epithets he bestowed on her ! But I will just detail a little, to show how "the pretty toy" was gradually exercising a certain power over that Solomon.

He told me, first, that he was intoxicated with happiness—everybody had congratulated him.

"And when I consider," said he, "that they were only felicitating me upon the appearance of my wife, and were yet ignorant of her sweet ways, her pretty thoughts, her goodness, truthfulness, and a thousand other things that charm me anew every day, no wonder that I felt extremely vain of her. And never more so than when she flew to the assistance of the poor girl who fell, binding up her bleeding arm with her own embroidered handkerchief. And then refusing to dance that she might comfort the girl's grandmother."

"Poor old lady, how the tears ran down her withered cheeks ! She was too old to come to such scenes, she said ; and I thought so, too, Peter, though, of course, I did not say so. But her grand-daughter has no other chaperon, and she thought it hard that youth should not

enjoy itself—so nice of her, Peter! So, what do you think I said?”

“Words wholly made up of liquid barley-sugar, strung into sentences with soft virgin honey, and uttered by a voice that a nightingale lent, just as she was bulbulbing herself off to sleep.”

“Oh! Peter, to think that such nonsense should proceed from your lips!”

“Oh! Dulce, to think that I can’t find any other words with which to express my feelings!”

“Well, in truth, I like to hear them. I like you to be foolish sometimes, Peter, though I pretend not. What power we women have!”

“’Tis true, you have; but remember your chiefest weapon is tenderness. I have almost fancied at times my wife does not love me so much as my Dulce did.”

I hung my head, a little abashed. How was I to tell him that the love of the girl was that innocent instinct that prompts the feminine nature to graft itself upon a strong support, and to glory in the abundance of the blooms and buds of love with which she can ornament her idol. But the love of the wife shelters itself behind a modesty and reserve that would keep still its youthful innocence and exalted fancies.

“You tremble, Dulce, my Dulce—and drooping your head, I cannot read your sweet face.”

“I love you, Peter—oh! you know it. When we are in heaven together, and are as the angels, then you will see how I love you!”

“Ah! sweet one, I wish I was better for your sake.”

“Nay, nay, let us say no more of that. You have not heard what I said to Mrs. Garth—in truth, I wish to know if I may have your permission. I said I would ask you if, now that I am married, I might chaperon her grand-daughter to balls.”

“Well, perhaps; but you must restrain that overflowing kindness of heart. In your position it will not do for people to think they may presume.”

“That is what I find so difficult, Peter. Why should I consider myself better than my neighbours?”

“You are altogether an angel. That being settled, let me ask you what impression the new friends and neighbours have made upon you?”

“I like Lord Harpendale very much. He is young and old—a very good mixture. But his lady is old—she has nothing young left about her. And as for the countess, she is, I suppose, good. She talked of Mrs. Hannah More as holding her conscience, entreated me to school my servants, to encourage the reading of tracts, some of which (oh! Peter, think of that!) she had in her pocket, and transferred them to mine—and here they are. Is not that taking heed of the time?” I am inclined to like the family of Ritson, who say they live in our village—I have not seen them.”

"No; they quarrelled with my sister, so they only sent cards to you on your arrival."

"Is it a quarrel that I must take up?"

"Not unless you like. You can perceive there is one among them rather pretty; being a plain family generally, they have elevated their Agnes into a beauty. In their love and admiration for her, my sister fancied they honoured your humble servant with a brotherly regard."

"Clearly I shall not quarrel with them for that. I like you to be loved, Peter."

"And married, Dudu, to Miss Agnes Ritson?"

"No, you would not have married her. I have no fears on that score. In truth, I do not see so much to admire in their Beauty. She seems too conscious of it, and sits mute and stupid-looking. I like the other sisters much more. They are animated and clever, and their love for their beauty is really touching."

"It struck me, that now, I being lost to them as a brother, they are casting sisterly eyes at Beaume."

"Then perhaps your sister will forgive them, and admit them once more to Mallerdean."

"You must remember that I am not supposed even to know they have quarrelled, therefore I may, without the charge of fickleness, take you to call upon them."

"I shall like it. Mamma bid me always be neighbourly."

"Yes, that is one of your duties, as Queen of the County."

"Peter, that awful position rather troubles me. Why does not your sister reign, if you must have a queen?"

"Because, because, and because. Make as much out of that as you can. She is a good sister, but she is not popular, and ours is an elective monarchy. You, my darling——"

"Oh! Peter, pray don't! To tell you the truth, I am not in love with the duties of your queen. They are frivolous. My idea of reigning is not to adjust quarrels and set fashions, but to act royally and think nobly."

"Well, you shall do both; and you may begin as soon as you like, for you are duly elected."

"We were to go that evening to an entertainment given by a Lady Joyce. She had not always been a person in a good position, so that Lady Lanton did not visit her. But as she was rich, and gave good dinners, Sir Brough never failed to attend her; and as she was a worthy person, doing all the duties of the world conscientiously, Peter was glad that his obligations as member could run smoothly with his inclinations."

Though I understood her antecedents to have been those of a milliner until old Sir John Joyce married her, I could not but be struck with the propriety and good breeding she showed. No entertainment of all the numerous ones we attended was better arranged. She looked upon me with a sort of mingled kindness and respect that made me


regard her as a friend immediately, and I felt she was one whose counsel I might safely ask upon occasion.

I perceived that Peter's penetration was not at fault with regard to the Ritsons and Mr. Beaume. The whole family were most affectionate to him, except the Beauty herself who merely gazed round the room, courting admiration.

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## CHAPTER XX.

### PAINS AND PENALTIES.

HEN Peter took me to call upon them, we found that the family consisted of an old father and seven or eight grown-up daughters. Some of them, indeed, were fully middle-aged, and, when all seen together, they were remarkable for plainness of feature. Generally a certain family likeness sets off a large sisterhood, but the Ritsons, by some speciality peculiar to them, were all plain, and all exemplified a different species of plainness. Agnes, the beauty, whose beauty they considered so great, and which was only so because of the contrast in themselves, was not ill-made. Her waist, her hands, and her feet were large; but she had fair, dimpled shoulders, long smooth ringlets, blue eyes, prettily fringed, and both looking the same way. Her nose was an ordinary good nose, mouth rosy and small; her teeth might have been better, but I soon discovered it was well they were no worse. She never seemed to be without a piece of barley-sugar in her mouth. It would seem this was a grievance to her sisters, for, unabashed, she would deny vehemently that she had any, though swallowing a large bit only the moment before. Altogether, if Agnes had not been a beauty, she would have been a stupid, ignorant young woman, wholly given up to small indulgences, without the strength of mind to deny herself.

The youngest, Clarissa, was my favourite. Plain, still there was a refinement and grace about her better than beauty. You felt sure her mind was as elegant as her movements.

They seemed, on the whole (apart from the weakness of worshipping their Beauty), a very worthy family, full of good deeds, daily thought of and performed. They were brimming over with enthusiasm, and kept running about in pursuit of these little excitements at all times and in all weathers, excepting the beauty; she led an idle life. She must not go out if the wind was rude and blustering, because of her complexion; she must not exert herself after meals, it would redden her nose; she must not read at night, for fear of her eyes; she must not work by day, for fear of stooping. Altogether she must have led rather a dull life of it, but the promise of getting married, held out to

her by her elder maiden sisters, appeared sufficient consolation for it all.

Nevertheless, Mr. Beaume seemed impervious to her charms. After condescending to regard him in a brotherly light, second only to Mr. Mallerdean, it was hard that he should not fall down at once and worship their idol. They were beginning to be seriously vexed with him, not to say astonished.

It was well for me that I had this previous breaking in for the London season, not only because of my country manners and home breeding, but to inure me to the late hours of fashionable gay life.

Society then was nothing like what it is this day ; there was very little pretence of order and decorum, though we were supposed to be ruled by the severe court of Queen Charlotte. The capacity to drink hard was esteemed at once a virtue and a grace in men. Absurd flattery, and a recklessness of words and meanings, would have driven away all modesty and reserve, if it had not been for the innate self-respect of English women, and the English characteristic of domesticity, that saved us from rushing headlong into the utmost extravagance of frivolous worldliness and wickedness.

It ensued, from Peter's occupation in the House of Commons, that Lady Lanton and I began to see more of each other than we had done before. Satisfied that I was under her wing and protection, Peter was anxious that I should enter into the gaiety of London, so as to fit me to become a great and fashionable lady ; also he wished me to amuse myself in his unavoidable absence. Unsuspicious of the ill-will gradually increasing against me in Lady Lanton's heart, I obeyed her suggestions implicitly, as to the manner in which I should dress and comport myself. That is, at first.

I had not lived in so large a family, having to exercise my judgment, though in trifles, without becoming possessed of a certain share of penetration and judgment. I soon discovered that when she did advise me it was in exact opposition to what I ought to have done. To make myself sure on this point, I consulted Lady Oram, who was in town, and so happily escaped making one or two mistakes that would have pained Peter. Heedless as was my nature, love made me sagacious and prudent.

But, of course, this led to the first "passage of arms" between Lady Lanton and myself. We had been to a masquerade. Peter had taken us there, and, after placing us under the care of Sir Brough, he left us, notwithstanding my entreaty to go home when he went off to the House. He said his sister would feel herself slighted if I left her.

Upon his departure, she bid me seat myself on a settee, rather conspicuously placed in the neighbourhood of the thoroughfare of a door. She herself, taking Sir Brough's arm, left me there alone, saying she must speak to some gentleman of the court (whom she had recognised from his attendance on the Prince of Wales, who



was not to be disguised under any form) about our presentations at the palace. Conscious that under no circumstances could even an elderly woman sit alone in such an assembly without the certainty of being insulted—equally conscious that it would be vain to appeal to her—I saw her go with dismay. Fortunately I recollected that beyond this room was another, where women servants waited on the ladies with sweet waters, pins, and any needful thing to repair their toilettes. I went there at once, and requesting one of them to hire for me a sedan chair, left the masquerade, and reached home in safety.

My first impulse was to tell my husband the facts, my second to say nothing unless questioned. Upon learning that I had said nothing to Peter on the subject, Lady Lanton saw her advantage, and took it. She rated me severely, and in contemptuous terms, for coming home alone. This was not all—she absolutely finished her fit of scolding by boxing my ears! That is, she slapt my cheek once. She had no opportunity of doing so a second time; with all the strength that youth, health, and indignation gave me, I pinioned down her arms, and carried her off to her own room, and laying her on a sofa, I marched off without a word. When we met again she was pale and sullen. But I thought it as well she should know that I would pass over the occurrence this once, and this once only. So I said to her quietly, yet with an air of haughtiness which I found it not the least difficult to assume—

“I did not tell your brother of the difficult position you placed me in at the masquerade, and I shall not tell him of the blow you gave me to-day—I have acted thus for his sake, not for yours. But do not count on my forbearance a third time. If you forget what is due to Mrs. Mallerdean, I shall not forget I am your brother’s wife. If we are to live together, recollect this! I will not bear all!”

“Insolent!” she exclaimed, “do you dictate terms to me?”

“Yes, the blow you gave has placed me in the position to do so.”

“And did you expect I should treat you as my equal? You are no better born than my waiting woman.”

“But so much better-bred that I can teach you your duty. Be reasonable. I suppose it is your wish to reside with us—you must take me as I am, a simple girl, perhaps; but, as your brother’s wife, an honoured woman. I will be treated as such, and in nothing, even from his sister, abate one jot of the respect due to me. If you cannot yield it, then we part—you must live elsewhere!”

The indignity of her blow rankled deeper every time I thought of it, and gave a vigour and force to my words that surprised myself.

“Part!—part from my brother! No, not if his wife were a thousand times more objectionable than she is! It is the more incumbent that I should stay near him, that her influence may be checked. No f

whatever I may have to endure at your hand, I never leave my brother !”

“ I think he would be sorry too,” I answered, frankly ; “ and I am sorry to have broached the subject. Nevertheless, you see it is impossible you and I can live together if you insult me. I shall not submit to it. Say what line you wish drawn between us, and I will take care not to overstep my boundary.”

“ Do not talk about boundaries. You must submit to my will, for you are as ignorant as you are obstinate.”

“ I am not ignorant that this is an unseemly quarrel between us, who have been sisters so short a time. I have no more to say ; our conversation is ended ! I mean to quarrel no more.”

“ You don’t ! we shall see. Have I not cause to quarrel with and hate you ? A nobody—a mere doll with a pretty face—to attempt to queen it over me ! To deceive people with an attempt at artlessness ; to set up a new style, a fashion ; to parade your country taste and pleasures, as if all the world were composed of milkmaids and shepherds ! Do you think these are things to please me ? No ; yet that is not the worst of your offence. I had a friend, she was indeed my sister—about to be really my sister—she was engaged to be married to my brother. Do you hear ? She was his love, his first love !”

“ I hear.”

“ And you have prevented this marriage.”

“ How so ? She married another person long ago.”

For a moment Lady Lanton was confounded.

“ Peter told me,” I continued, “ and also mentioned how you loved her. But rest satisfied—it was her own fault, not mine, that she never became your sister. If I had not been born, Peter would never have married her.”

I left the room after this.

It surprised me to perceive how little Peter knew his sister’s real disposition.

I never argued again with her. It was useless. She had made up her mind to hate me, and was persistent and energetic in carrying out the intention. So far she was afraid of what she called “ my rude sincerity,” and we had no open quarrel ; but, after a time, I had to fear her in another way.

It was soon after this that, happening to be at an assembly, as it was called, with Peter, a lady, with a genuine air of fashion and dissipation, accosted my husband ; she must have been beautiful in her first youth, but she was fading fast from the effects of rouge, late hours, and a tendency to grow fat.

“ Peter,” she said, in a free way, “ you have not introduced me to your wife ?”

“ I do not intend to do so,” he answered, with a grave, stern air.

She coloured through her rouge, but laughing loudly, said,

“ Perhaps you are right—we might quarrel.”

A few nights after this, when Lady Lanton accompanied me to a card-party without my husband, she suddenly brought up this lady to me, and introduced her as the Countess Harmann.

Being pinned into a corner, I could not escape the introduction ; I bowed slightly, while she curtsied almost to the ground.

She expressed herself in the high-flown language that was common in those days, as charmed to make my acquaintance ; she made no allusion to the conversation with Peter, which she knew I must have overheard ; but she rattled on about every conceivable topic for some time, not giving me the option of answering her, had I been so inclined. I was taller than she, and I saw she became embarrassed with the grave and steady gaze with which I looked down on her. She felt rebuked. Oh ! sad sight, when one woman shrinks from the innocent eyes of another woman. Something told me how hollow within was all her affected mirth ! how sad the state of that perverted mind ! how deep, how mournful the regrets ! As I looked, I pitied. This was the woman who had lost what I had gained ; and lost it, from what ? That was the question ; though ignorant of the real reason, I could not the less pity her.

As she left me, and turned away, I heard her whispering to Lady Lanton,

“ She cannot be so young and innocent as they say.”

“ She is preposterously childish,” was the reply.

Lady Lanton was not the only instance I have known in my long life of a person assuming what they wished to be the truth. I was childish about some things—my horse, the fresh air, the flowers, the sunshine. She had been accustomed all her life to have whatever she desired, and she did not care much about anything. I had experienced what it was to wish for many things, and not to have them ; and somehow I enjoyed everything ; was it only a newly-opened rose, or a dewy, fresh morning—either filled my heart with joy. Education in our time was more mechanical than it is now. Thus Lady Lanton was a fine musician, an elegant writer, a good linguist, and smattered a little in literature. But she was a slave to prejudice and ceremony. She was really distressed by the wrong pronunciation of a word, by the omission of any formality, by the want of a certain etiquette. She would forgive a deadly sin rather than a trivial breach of politeness ; she spoke of lies, murder, and wickedness with less horror than vulgarity, want of fashion, or rustic manners—that is, in others. She never seemed to see the rudeness of her speech and ways when her own temper was roused.

I thought I ought to tell Peter that I had been introduced to the Countess Harmann.

He looked grave. Then he said,

“ I must imitate your frankness, Dulce. She is the lady I meant at one time for my wife.”

“ Oh, Peter, but is she not older than you ? ”

"No, but she does not lead a life that is either healthy or wise, hence she is becoming old before her time; Dulce, it rests with you if I shall tell you our first history."

"I think I will not hear it, Peter; I suppose it is not a pleasant history, and I don't like melancholy things." (But I should like to have heard it all the same; I was like a person wishing to bathe, yet fearing the first plunge.)

"I would rather not tell it, for several reasons, the first and chiefest being yourself. But remember, it is always in your power to demand it of me. The telling of it will at least remove from my mind the painful feeling of seeming better than I really am."

"That is just what I do not want to know, so let the matter rest, and tell me how I am to act towards the Countess Harmann. Am I to be easy and natural, or severe and cold?"

"Can you be severe and cold?" answered Peter, laughing.

"Oh, yes!" and I gave him a specimen, adding: "Marblette is very clever at it, and can be as haughty as possible."

"Well, I think you shall be easy and natural, because I fancy you will not wish to be on terms of great friendship with the Countess."

"Do you think I shall be jealous?"

"I will give you no cause."

"But real jealousy seldom wants a cause, or rather invents its own."

"You seem learned on the matter. Have you felt the pang?"

"Yes—I am jealous of your horse when you pat him; jealous of the wind that kisses you; jealous of the flowers you touch; jealous of all those people who see you, speak to you, are near you, when I am away."

"That is a jealousy I admire. I wish I thought you loved me as much as that."

"Do you think I don't?"

"You are very shy of showing it. I shall watch you."

"There is no need to watch—you know it."

"I know this, that I love you more and more every day."

"Which is quite right, because I am improving very much, and becoming quite a lady of fashion. Lord Oram told me last night, with an asseveration that sent us both where we don't wish to go, that I entered the room with the true quality swing, and that I held my cards and made bets with a grace and freedom few women of fashion could surpass. I hope you are pleased?"

"Well—no."

"Then, Peter, that is very nice of you to say so, because, in truth, I do not like going out, unless you are with me. Had I staid at home last night, I should not have been introduced to the Countess, or have gained this equivocal compliment."

"You shall for the future go or not as you please."

"No, it must be as you please; because what you please will please your sister."

"It is to be hoped somebody will be pleased with all these pleasures."

"I shall—to stay at home with you. When I say, 'Peter, there is a party to-night,' you must say, 'I hope you will not think of going.' Then I shall say, dutifully, 'Not if you wish me to stay, Peter;' and you must reply imperiously, as becomes a husband—'I desire you stay.'"

"My darling, I could not be imperious as a husband; I should only entreat as a lover."

It will be perceived that I was beginning to take to wife-like ways, and that Peter was becoming quite a slave to his "toy." So, for some time, I did not go anywhere without him. Sadly wicked did the world seem to me in those days. I longed for Marblette, just to talk of something else than dress, cards, scandal, and flattery.

The Countess Harmann, visiting Lady Lanton, came at times, without asking permission, into my apartment. This I thought a liberty which I had the right to resent. I therefore requested her to send me a message when she designed to wait upon me, as at times it might be inconvenient to me to receive her.

"She is the haughtiest little chit I ever met," remarked the Countess, as if in jest, and laughing at me.

"Her head is turned," answered Lady Lanton.

I might have been angry at their endeavours to humiliate me, but, in truth, I did not care enough about them. I was Peter's wife. I had a right to be haughty. I took care to be told when Lady Harmann entered the house, and took refuge in my bed-room, whither she had not yet had the audacity to follow me.

But I felt they were gradually drawing a sort of net round me that began to influence others. It may be they whispered something to my disadvantage; or that the town, after its usual fashion, had another and a newer thing to run after than the simplicity of a country girl.

As my liking for praise and admiration was excited more by the effect on Peter than myself, I saw with equanimity the change. There could be no doubt that both my sister-in-law and her friend considered me as jealous, and made me feel that my coldness towards her was a certain proof. Vexed in my heart to be taxed with what I disclaimed as regarded Lady Harmann, I gladly hailed the end of the London season, and felt as if Mallerdean had been always my home, so rejoiced was I to return to it. Also, at last, I was to see my father and mother and Marblette!

It was only when prepared to welcome them that I knew how much I had missed them. My feelings almost amounted to pain. Would they seem different to me? Should I be changed to them? Never more should we be to each other what we had been before! I was frightened to think of it. I need not have been so. They clasped me in their arms with the same warmth and welcome as ever; and Mar-

blette, looking prettier, sweeter, more dainty than my memory painted her, was that little darling, imperious, bright, sportive Marblette who could wind me round her finger like a thread of silk.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### SURPRISES.



LADY LANTON intended to be frigid to my people, but she was not proof against papa's humour and good sense—nor resist that gentle charm which made my mother so sweet a companion.

As for Marblette, Lady Lanton adopted her at once as a pet. In this she was primevally excited by the hope of paining me.

"She had been prepared," she said, "by Mallerdean, to expect a superior person, but one so charming in every respect was indeed a surprise. She had been entrusted by him to procure for the young lady a present against her arrival: she had for a time fancied it too costly, but really she hardly knew if anything was good enough for so pretty a creature."

I must mention that kindness of Peter's. He gave me some valuable presents to put into the rooms of my father and mother. The present for Marblette was a set of pearls; he gave it me, saying,

"In the deep still of night, I often hear a word whispered in soft dreaming tones. It is the name of Marblette."

"Ah, Peter, is that the only name you hear—at such times?"

"I acknowledge that sometimes I hear my own. Nevertheless there is a plaintiveness, a sort of yearning cry in the tone of the other, that moves me. It makes me fear lest I should not welcome this beloved Marblette as warmly as she deserves."

"You see, Peter, we have always loved each other dearly; also we have had adventures together, and the only thing I regretted in marrying you was the fear some other love might come between the love of Marblette and myself."

"Not meaning me, I presume, but my sister?"

"Yes."

"Well, you are satisfied on that score."

(He little thought how much it was the other way).

"I shall ask Marblette if she sees any difference in me."

"Do so, and let me know the result."

Upon putting the question, Marblette gravely examined me from head to foot, and then, mimicking our hair-dresser, declared, "Dear me, Miss, I think you be grewed!"

This set me off laughing. I rushed into a series of questions about

home news, which, as Marblette said, would take her a year to answer. In the middle of them, she said—

“I made myself very unhappy after you were gone, by fearing lest your husband’s sister should take my place in your heart. I think I bemoaned myself for nothing.”

“True, she does not love me, and never will.”

“That is, you don’t care to have her love?”

“Perhaps you are right, we are different in every way; you would not believe it, she has three boys.”

“As this is the first day of our arrival, we will permit her to keep her maternal feelings to herself for a little.”

“But, Marblette, she has a horrid temper.”

I longed to tell Marblette about the blow she had given me, and the ridiculousness of my carrying her pinioned to her own room; but she was Peter’s sister, and I thought it better not.

“I think I should like her in a passion better than so stately and pompous.”

“Ah, you don’t like her. I am glad!”

“You ought to be sorry; if matrimony has taught you to be ill-natured, what a blow to me!”

“To you! why to you?”

“Because I must inquire if I am to have any sisters-in-law before I can venture into the plunge.”

“There can be few sisters-in-law like mine.”

“In fact,” continued Marblette, blushing like twenty June roses, “I already know I am to have three.”

“What! what! Marblette, be serious—look at me—speak plainly.”

“You would marry and leave me, so I thought it best to marry too.”

For a moment I was aghast.

Astonished at my silence, she touched me.

“Oh! Marblette, how you surprise me!—why did you not confide in me?”

“I had nothing to confide.”

“But when did you meet?—how was it settled?—only six months ago since I left home—and you have fallen in love!”

“Somebody fell in love in one evening.”

“Ah! yes, but you see that was excusable when it was Peter!”

“I think it still more excusable when it is——”

Marblette paused, cruel girl! Though it was childish of me, I was longing to hear his name. I hoped it would not be Constantine, but Samuel, or Andrew, even Nathaniel.

“Yes, dear,” I suggested, to help her on.

“Him!” she answered. “It is allowable when you are in love to set up a ‘him,’ you know.”

“But the real name? Remember, Marblette, what we settled about names long ago.”

"Is it possible that an elderly married woman, more than six months wedded, should remember, and even like to remember, such folly?"

"I do, I love it. I am a child again, seeing you. Is it Andrew?"

"No, to ease your mind, he was christened Richard, and, I believe, has been called Dick; but when I speak his name, I say Hythe!"

"Lord Hythe! You are to be a baroness, Marblette!"

"Yes, too true, and take precedence of Mrs. Peter. But you are forgetting Lady Lanton."

"Where did you meet him? Is he rich? Fancy, only one syllable to his name, and you wanted three!"

"So did some one else, though she seemed overwhelmed with delight when she got a husband with but two. I will put to the most disinterested person we know, if the monosyllable 'Hythe' is not better than the polysyllable——"

"Don't—have it your own way. Hythe is the prettiest name."

"Now, that is reasonable; but the name is nothing to the person!"

"Oh! no; look at Peter!"

"Ha! ha! so it has slipped out at last. Oh! Dudu, what a pity Sissy is not here to say you 'ought' to speak the truth!"

"Laugh as you like, but please tell me all about Hythe—my brother to be."

Now it was Marblette's turn to blush.

All I could do she would tell me nothing of his personal appearance. He was good, oh! so good, and nice—indeed, nice did not express what he was. There was that want in the English language (usually so rich in adjectives) which failed to delineate Lord Hythe in the most appropriate terms—that is, in terms he deserved. It would be necessary to coin some on purpose for him.

"But we are to be very poor," continued Marblette, glibly, now she was on another subject. "He is paid attaché somewhere or another abroad, and, perhaps, some of these days he may be an ambassador."

And she looked the ambassadress already, dear little thing!

"Gracious goodness!" I exclaimed; "but then you will always live abroad!"

"Yes, that is certain."

"And at no one knows how great a distance!"

"Too true. I believe they seriously talk of opening friendly relations with the Court of Peking."

"Oh! Marblette!"

"So, if we go, I shall be able to tell you if it is true about the Chinese women's little feet. If it is, I shall notify to the Empress of China my impression of such a ridiculous fashion."

It seemed to me that the intended Baroness Hythe, accredited ambassadress to the Court of Peking, and Mrs. Peter, were exactly like the



Marblette and Dudu of girlish days ; no wiser, no older. But we enjoyed this idle chattering as much as of old.

Of course Lord Hythe was invited to Mallerdean ; and when he came, Marblette's vivid blushes, her uncontrollable smiles, her furtive glances of delight, fully showed how she enjoyed our surprise.

As she was so shy in describing him, I concluded he was plain, perhaps a little gauche. Perhaps just a slight cast, or prematurely bald, or, at all events, little and insignificant-looking, very unlike my Peter. But, on the contrary, he was so handsome ; the most beautiful youth (for he looked very young for his age) that fancy could paint. Faultless features, the freshest bloom, hair of which every curl was a study, with an athletic, well-developed figure. And yet all these advantages were wholly eclipsed by his manner. The frankest, gentlest, manliest, most courteous, most happy tempers governed him by turns. He was a merry boy with us all, a chivalrous lover to his betrothed, a sage with my father, a loving son to my mother, an excellent, coaxing, dear brother to me, and a Whig ; so that he was after Peter's own heart.

Marblette confided to me that she loved him "very well."

"Good gracious !" said I ; "I love him devotedly !"

"That's just what you ought to do ; but come, I am to see your house."

I may as well take the opportunity of describing Mallerdean.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### MALLERDEAN.



T was, I allow, situated too low. It was approached through a well-wooded park. Three miles without a hill, and then one mile of an avenue of the finest beech-trees I ever saw. They had been celebrated for a century. Underneath these beech-trees, at certain seasons of the year, the deer would congregate in picturesque groups.

This avenue did not take us up straight to the entrance, which was a royal one, arched over, but continued its course across the green sward, up to a rising piece of ground. It was called a hill, but, indeed, it was not much of one.

The entrance was the oldest part of the house, and consisted of a tower. Deeply ensconced within the arch was the hall-door, of massive oak, studded with great nails. The sound it made in closing vibrated through the house, as if it gave notice it was fulfilling its ward and watch.

We entered a small vestibule which was lined with doors. Some were for use, and some only to match those that were used. Folding-doors, twice as large as the hall door, ushered us into a lofty square hall, lighted by a skylight, and having a heavy oaken gallery or corridor all round it. A somewhat narrow staircase, with elaborately carved oaken balustrades, and very shallow stairs, led up to the corridor. Both were so thickly carpeted, that the foot fell noiselessly upon them, giving no indication of your approach. From this corridor you entered bed-rooms, or closets, or long passages, or galleries, as it might chance.

There was neither order nor regularity in the upper part of the house. Rooms seemed to be taken off galleries or passages just as if from whim. They were generally lofty, fine rooms, excellently lighted with large, old-fashioned windows. The furniture was ancient, but beautifully kept.

The silken hangings of the best room had been bought and hung for the use of some crowned head, and they seemed either as though they had never been new, or would never be old. On the door of this room was painted, or rather emblazoned, "The King's Chamber." Another was entitled, "The Marquis's Chamber;" and a third, which was ours, "His Honour's Apartments." This door opened into a suite of rooms, that made a house of itself for the master and mistress of the house, with their attendants.

They were beautiful rooms, and looked out upon a garden so arranged, as to resemble patchwork. All the flower-beds were in little quaint shapes, like Chinese puzzles, and they went in pairs. Between them were little narrow walks covered with gravel composed of shells; here and there, a shepherd or shepherdess, carved in stone, stood on a pedestal, in an awkward or uncomfortable position. Two, in particular, apparently bidding each other adieu, he with a scythe and she with a crook, somehow reminded me of our dear Adam and Eve. They were dressed similarly—the shepherdess having the same sort of shoes, and ruff, and a gilt comb in her hair—while the shepherd must have had his inexpressibles made by the same tailor as our Adam. They were, even to the number of buttons, exactly alike.

In addition to these statues—which, by-the-by, the peacocks seemed to consider were placed there for their convenience—there were many stone vases, two little fountains, the water spouting out of the ears, noses, eyes, and mouths of two very fat stone boys. Also there were summer-houses in two corners, one of which was called the banqueting-room, and the other the summer-parlour.

Both were the same size, the windows large and numerous, the walls painted with gods and goddesses, cupids, satyrs, dancing nymphs, strange animals, birds as big as Jupiter himself, and anything that was out of nature, out of reason, and not particularly pleasant to look at.

There were two dining-rooms, furnished so exactly alike as even to

have some duplicate pictures, but they differed greatly in size. In the small one a dozen people could dine comfortably; in the large one there was ample room for three times that number.

The drawing-rooms were rather narrow—the large one being properly a ball-room, and built for the performance of country dances, polonaises, and things one now never hears of. The China drawing-room originally belonged to it, having a raised floor, on which minuets were performed—the dancers being sufficiently elevated as to be conspicuous to all in the room. The green drawing-room, which was the one we always used, had a comfortable quiet air about it, notwithstanding its white marble tables, and the gilding that covered the ceiling.

It was a house of which to be proud, for everything in it bespoke not only the antiquity, but the wealth of the family that owned it.

In some of the bedrooms, the looking-glasses were framed in silver, and the ewers and jugs all to match. Even the handles of the doors were silver, the rims of the fenders and handles of the fire-irons, with little silver kettle and tripod.

I had been told that few private families had so valuable a collection of china. And when I was first shown the drapery which came from Holland, with the Mallerdean crest and arms, and the date 1672, I was made at the same time to remark the care with which it was kept. Those articles which had been darned were shown as efforts of needlework—the darns surpassing the beauty of the original fabric.

In thus summing up the glories and riches of my home, I am led to reflect what I thought of it all in those days—whether I was uplifted, and said in my heart, “Soul, thou hast much treasure laid up here—eat, drink, and be merry, and enjoy thyself.”

I cannot recollect that I thought anything about it at all. I remember being glad that Peter possessed all these things, as everybody about the place seemed so proud of them.

In a letter Mrs. Wallace congratulated me on always dining off plate; to which I replied, “that I did not know but that everybody had plates for dinner;” which, as she said, was a want of observation for which I deserved a good shaking.

But I had a fit of conceit when I showed my house to Marblette, and, imitating the manner of the old housekeeper, I discoursed largely on the glory of this, and the worth of that, and the rareness of another; to all of which Marblette listened with very becoming attention. But not being as much edified as I wished, I concluded by saying,

“You see, Marblette, very few people have such a beautiful house as I have, or such rare pictures, or such curious china, or such——”

“Or such a mistress, who no more cares for any of these things than if they were the leaves blown under the trees. They are Peter’s, and that is all you think about them.”

“I don’t know, Marblette; I am beginning to think——”

“That a ride is much more to your taste, and a scramble in Ravenshawe still more prized.”

"That is very true; but still this is a very fine house," I persisted.

"A fine case, and it contains fine birds," said Marblette.

"I was told by one of the Miss Ritsons that once upon a time they were nearly having a very fine mistress here. She was a school-fellow of Lady Lanton's. Do you mind my telling you?"

"No, go on."

"Well! she was wonderfully beautiful, but also, to use their expression, she was gay—too gay for them. She had eyes of extreme beauty, power, and softness, and Miss Ritson did not seem to hesitate to declare they had something of a basilisk nature in them. They allured people. But Peter escaped their allurements, and so this fine house, with all its beautiful ornaments, its pictures, its furniture, has no better mistress than an overgrown, odd sort of a girl, who cares for only one thing in the world, and that thing is called Peter."

"You know I care for you."

"I am not jealous, I am very fond of Peter too, but I must tell you Lady Lanton has already spoken to me about her beautiful school-fellow, as if she regretted you were here instead of her."

"I am sorry to be so wicked, but I don't seem to care for her disappointment."

"Don't you wonder why Peter did not marry her?"

"I don't deny you the right to wonder, only don't deny Peter the right to choose his own wife."

"Ah! I see the dignity of Mrs. Mallerdean peeping through the pettishness of Dudu."

"Now, Marblette, don't you see it is Peter's secret, and that I must not tell it."

"I was only teasing you. Profoundly discreet as Mrs. Mallerdean is, that tell-tale face of Dudu's revealed to me she knew the whole affair."

"But I do not, at least not all. Tell me, would you like to hear that which Hythe might blush to tell?"

"No, one reason being that he has nothing of that sort to tell."

"Marblette, what a blessing it is to have such faith! I am glad I married Peter before I knew the world. I think it now a very wicked world, and I should have been afraid to leave you all, and go away alone, with even a man like Peter, thinking then as I do now."

"I would think no more, then, if I was you, unless I could think more agreeably of my fellow-creatures."

"But I cannot help it—it is forced on me."

"It may be in London, but not here. I am sure Mr. Beaume seems stupidly harmless, the Ritsons amiably weak, Lady Joyce wholly devoted to you, and they are your three nearest neighbours. And when we went in all that grand state to the races, the people bowed down before you as if you were their Queen."

"So I am. It seems that here they always elect a Queen of the County."

"Papa thinks that you ought not to be elected Queen until you have proved you are worthy of the honour."

"They say they trusted Peter's choice, they respect him so much."

"Then it will be a fine thing to do, Dudu, to act so as not to disappoint them. Mamma is afraid lest your head should be turned. I tell her that all the state you live in, the homage you receive, and the adoration paid you, have not so much an effect upon you as a word of love from those you esteem. Your heart is the truly sensitive thing about you."

"Thank you for your good opinion, but still I was very proud of our coach, with its six horses, all bedecked with ribbons, and the scarlet outriders with their silver trumpets, trumpeting out that we were coming, and everybody was to make way. And then the shouting, and the welcome, and the the taking off their hats, all gratified me."

"Yes, because we were there to witness it. You would not have cared half so much had you been alone."

"I suppose not—indeed, I know you judge me rightly, and I wanted papa to see how Peter was beloved."

"Be satisfied, papa was greatly pleased, and he took the opportunity of giving me a little homily as to different positions—each had its pleasures and duties. You are a great county lady, and I am nothing but a little embryo ambassadress, having to obey orders, look after all my pennies, and think of anybody but myself."

"Oh ! Marblette, you shall never want for money while I live."

"Thank you. I have no fear of starvation, and I have one great advantage over you—I shall not live with Lady Lanton."

"Yes, certainly she is a thorn in my side."

"I think you behave very well to her. But some of these days Peter will discover you can never be happy while she lives with you. Mamma says there is a covert malevolence in her manner towards you that alarms her much ; all the more because she does not show it in her brother's presence. Mamma had a mind to remonstrate with her, especially after that pointed and rude remark that she made about her wish that Peter had chosen me and not you. But papa would not permit her. He said :

"I did not expect Dulce to be wholly happy. I concluded she would have trials of some sort. Let her own good sense carry her through them—it will be time enough for us to interfere when she requires our assistance. Meantime, she must be sensible that she is gradually gaining her husband's esteem, having his love already. A wife has a position so powerful, that it must be through some fault of her own if she suffers an enemy to come between her and her husband."

"I think papa is right."

"At the same time, let me tell you, I have an opinion as well as papa. Don't, for the sake of peace, give way to Lady Lanton."

She is not a person who will like you any the better for deferring to her."

"When we are alone I do not do so. Since you have been here, I have endeavoured to appease her, that she might appear in a more favourable light to you."

"Under no circumstances can she do that. It is my opinion that Envy, Hatred, and Malice have always been rooted in her heart, but there never has been any occasion given her to show them until now. And now they are very fine plants indeed, and seem wholly in possession of that place where her heart ought to be."

That was very severe of Marblette's judgment; but being human, she naturally felt more angry for me than I did for myself.

Buffy had fine times while they were all with us. For the first time in his life he began to see that there was a place in the world for children as well as for grown-up people. He saw that he was not to blame for being in existence at all; but on the contrary, that, being born, he inherited certain rights and privileges that were very pleasant. He persisted in calling me Mother Hubbard, braving his mother's severest anger; and having assigned me the chiefest place in his heart, he gravely assorted the rest of the world according to his liking for them.

My mother came second to me. There was something in her gentle fond love for children that went straight to the heart of this hitherto desolate little being.

"She looks always pleased to see me," was Buffy's response to the question why he loved her.

Peter came third, "because Mother Hubbard would be vexed if it was not so. Not that Uncle Mallerdean had ever shown him much attention, but people respected him, and Mother Hubbard loved him, so there must be some good in him. Besides, he was the head of the house."

Marblette was the fourth, because she was pretty.

"I like to look at her," says Buffy the quaint. "Her face is like the sky, never the same. Also she is funny, and it is so pleasant to laugh."

Poor boy!

As for his father, and mother, and brothers, they seemed to have no place at all in his affections.

"Papa is not a gentleman."

"My lady prefers not to be loved."

"When my brothers grow older, I shall be able to judge if I can love them."

Such were his replies if questioned.

He liked his nurse.

"She is an honest woman; she kisses my hand if I please her, and she whips me hard if I disobey her."

As his little misanthropic mind awoke gradually to the pleasant

feelings of loving and being loved, his small plain face grew handsome with expression, his thin little frame enlarged and filled out; and when delivered from his nankin suit, he was able to run about, and soon became quite merry and robust.

On the whole, the change that came over my dear Buffy was remarkable, and very pleasant to see.

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## CHAPTER XXIII.

### THE MOTHER.



SISSY and I each took a little son to our father, to be signed with the sign of the cross by his dear hand. All the romance in Sissy's nature, which had hitherto been kept within a boundary of "oughts," broke through that boundary, and revelled henceforth in uncontrolled power through her son. From the moment of his birth her thoughts had never swerved one instant from him. Her husband, hitherto all-important, now was only considered as his son's father.

As for grandmamma, she sat and stared at Sissy through her spectacles in speechless amazement. That a girl brought up as she had been, a first-rate musician, a perfect linguist, with a talent for painting, and well versed in history—to say nothing of that ever vigilant and respectful observance of time—should now waste hours, yes, whole hours, in gazing at a little, sleepy, hungry, unintelligible baby, was inexplicable!

When I arrived, she received me somewhat coldly. I feel sure she imagined she was to be doubly shocked, my character having always been the most impulsive. But as I sat a whole hour chatting, and never once alluded to my baby, she rose and suddenly kissed me. When it was proposed that one of the little aunts should run and bring him in to be shown to all their admiring eyes, I objected, on the score that there was plenty of time for that, and he had better recover his journey.

She rose and kissed me again.

Finally, when he was brought in, I remarked—

"The only prettiness I see in him is his father's brow."

"Sissy says," remarked grandmamma, "that Philip's nails are like her baby's. Dulce, you seem very sensible about your child—not too foolishly fond."

(Oh, my baby, my darling, my little precious son, did I ever seem sensible in my love for you? I do not know what other mother's feel, but I thought to myself, "You are my first-born—I feel like Eve, when Cain was given her—wondering, half afraid—but, oh! so happy! No other child can be to me what you are, my first God's gift! So good I feel when I look at you, because I have gotten a man from the

Lord ! and his soul is precious, to be reared for eternity. I doted on you, my little Peter, only I scarcely showed it, because of the love I bore my great Peter ! Oh ! I loved you, I loved you, my precious first-born !”)

But Sissy had great reason to be proud of her boy. He was not only a very fine child, but wonderfully pretty for a baby. As he lay fast asleep in his mother's arms, dressed in his christening robes, the soft lace, the pretty ribbons, the rich rosettes, all added to his beauty. He was quite a picture. Whereas I must allow little Peter did not look pretty at all. In the first place, he would sit bolt upright, and had a sort of inquisitive, knowing look in his face, very unbecoming a baby. He always looked nice in his little, plain nightcap and nightgown ; but dressed out, his baby finery only seemed to make him more red in the face, and showed that he had lean little arms and a long neck ; and worse than all, through the lace of the cap it could be seen that what hair he had was of a most suspicious sherry colour ! When his grandfather threw the baptismal water in his face, he looked up at him with the astonishment and dignity of quite an old man who had been insulted. My darling, how I loved you that day !

Of course Nurse Alexander came to see our children, and pronounce upon them. Sissy was gratified by hearing that in all nurse's experience in babies never had she seen so fine a child as hers, while I was comforted by hearing that mine would grow up very tall and strong.

“He has vara lang limbs, ye see, and the firrst joint o' the fingers is astonishin', it's sae lang. He will be sax feet, if ye hae the luck to rear him, and may be mair.”

“If I have the luck ! he is very healthy, nurse.”

“There's mair fear o' fair-haired laddies than dark, ye ken. I am joost warning ye, for though yer hart is owre full of yer husband to care unco for the little lad, the mither's hart is in ye.”

“Have you been dreaming at all lately, nurse ?”

“Ay, I damed of ye baith twa neeghts runnin'.”

“Will you tell us the dream ?”

“If it pleases ye.”

Sissy being even more anxious than I was, for I had a sort of dread just flitting through my mind, Nurse Alexander proceeded—

“I was no weel that firrst neeght. I was vara rrestless, and I telled ma darghterr, as I thought as it worr useless ganging to ma bed. And she said, ‘Mither, I'll gie ye ale-posset, and maybe that'll bring sleep.’ And I tuck the ale-posset, but whiles I drrank it I had the feel on me o' something cooming. ‘It's the Lorrd spaking to me,’ I says to my darghterr, ‘and I shall sleep, but it is to drame of that which is cooming.’ And I fell to sleep at aince. Then I thought I was in a fairr garden, and the smell of the place was vara sweet. There were posies stuck in the ground ; and gilliflowers, and pansies, and sweet mignonette were growing from the brranches of oaks and



beeches. And on the ane side of me was a hoose made o' glass, and within were rows and rows of red pots wi' flooers in 'em. And I lookit, and on the ither side was anither hoose o' the same sorrt, but farr larrger. But there wor nothin' in it. Then I lookit, and I sawr Meestress Carne cooming oot o' the hoose fool o' butiful flooers, and in her arrms she bore as many pots as her could hold. And I thought in my drame she lookit fairr and smiling, and was grown to a fine portly woman. And at once I sawr my pratty Mustress Mallerdean, standing at the doorr o' the larrge empty hoose, and in her arms she held a little wee pot o' flooers. But her sweet face was all stricken wi' a mortal terror; she worr luiking doon at a larrge pot wi' a butiful tree in it, covered wi' buds and blooms, and maist buteous to see, but it had fa'en from her arrms, and lay all smashed and broken. So dinna set yer hearrt too much on the little lad, my darling. He will be lent to ye mony years, for the butiful tree was well growed, but ye will hae to give him back to the Lorrdr."

It required a hopeful, happy spirit, such as mine was then, to rise superior to the fear this dream created. I laughed at it, and asked her if she had not one less doleful to tell us. My husband was fair-haired and tall; and he had lived through childhood. So would my little Peter. It seemed to me that my love was sufficient to shield him from all ill.

Nurse Alexander's dream made no lasting impression upon me. The return to the house where I had been child and girl—now a wife and mother—occupied me much more. Comparing the present feelings with the past, I realised, for the first time since I married, the true power a woman possesses in the world. Regretting no more the simple pleasures and innocent duties of girlhood, I began to reckon up the proud privileges of an honoured wife, the rich blessings of a happy mother. It seemed to me that in this my first home, where sprung the first germs of every thought, the new ones should take root also. By the grave-stone that bore my name as dead, though living, I reminded myself that I might as well be dead as have these feelings and not use them.

In the great town church where, as a child, I fancied the angel eyes of my little name-sister looked down on me, watching if I filled her place well, I knelt and prayed for grace and strength to perform the higher duties of wife and mother with the faith and purity of an angel.

In our little bed-chamber, watching once more the doing up the nursery fire, gazing at the mouse-holes, peeping up the garret stairs, pacing up and down the long garden walk, visiting the sad remains of Ear-wig cottage, looking into the round convex mirror, with a glance at the brave sword swathed in its many bags, I gathered together in my mind a vast store of early thoughts and feelings.

These I intended to hoard and muse over, and I prayed to God to keep the thoughts of my heart such as he would have them.

I imagine few young ladies return to their first home without feelings

analogous to mine. They made me grave. My little sisters, remembering the playfellow that never let them be dull, were greatly disappointed. They openly entreated Marblette not to marry, if she was to return home so great a fine lady as Dudu, whose nursery name of Dudu was almost forgotten.

Marblette gravely assured them it was not Dudu's fault that she was now a fine lady. She had been elected Queen of a County, and Queens were obliged to be dull and stately. Whereas she, Marblette, not being tall enough to be a Queen, no such change would happen to her. So she hoped they would be so obliging as to let her marry.

They consented, on condition that she promised to refuse a crown if offered her. Dear little sisters ! If disappointed at that time in me, I think I may venture to hope it was for the last time, though their fates and mine lay widely separated.

Marblette was married while Sissy and I were at home. Playful as was her temperament, she had very strong feelings.

"Marblette," I whispered, the evening before, as she sat white and shivering in a corner, "God has been very good to us, giving us each the love of a man whose nature is noble and true."

She made no reply. So I continued :

"There is something almost awful in the thought that we have the happiness of one human heart in our keeping. I did not like being married at first, but, Marblette, the position of wife and mother is a noble one."

Still no answer. Again I whispered :

"You do not doubt Hythe's love?"

An indignant flash from her eyes was my only answer.

"I want to comfort you, Marblette, how can I do it?"

She squeezed my hands, but still made no reply.

"I am sure Hythe has the sweetest temper and the best heart possible. Peter says he never met with anyone of his own sex for whom he felt so strong a liking."

Another indignant look.

Finally, I let her alone, which I had better have done at first. To each sensitive heart there occur phases of life that can meet with no response from another.

When Sissy married, she was assailed with fears lest she should love Philip more than grandmamma. When I married, I dreaded lest I should not love Peter enough. What Marblette's feelings were I never knew—the little thing only spoke of them to God, and He answered ; for at the altar she looked like the inspired spirit of gentleness, sweetness, and love.

So beautiful a bride and bridegroom were rarely seen ; in the perfection of their personal appearance, in their youth and simplicity, in the fervour of their vows, the exalted expression of their faces, they seemed to exemplify the picture of Adam and Eve, described by Milton in "*Paradise Lost*."

They were to leave for their foreign home immediately, and the first people who would hope to see them were ourselves. Peter promised to take me to them in the summer. When my father kissed Marblette, now Lady Hythe, to bid her good-bye, he was too agitated to speak, and the tears rolled down his cheeks.

"Did you love me so much, papa?" said Marblette, as in surprise.

We knew it, if she did not.

"Then I will so act," she continued, "that you shall love me more."

And she kept her word. Though she was never accredited ambassadress at the court of Peking, she was long the cynosure of many eyes in the little court where she resided. "When the eye saw her, it loved her; when the ear heard her, it blessed her." And papa knew this and rejoiced.

While we were in the north, Peter and I went to Oram Castle, and acted our courtship over again. As for me, I was surprised that little more than a year could have changed me so completely as it had done; and I asked Peter how my behaviour at that period looked to him on retrospection, whether it did not look foolish and forward.

"Not by any means," he said; "everything I had done then was perfect—he loved the remembrance of my white muslin frock, and though my new dresses were most becoming, he should always think white muslin and gold chains the prettiest of all dresses; and that so far from having been 'forward,' if he had had a fault to find, it was that I had been too shy."

Perhaps I asked Peter all this only to hear that I was everything he most admired then; everything he most doted on now. Nevertheless, I felt very old. It seemed as though a dozen years had passed since that drive in the buff chariot, dressed in Sissy's new frock.

When we returned to Mallerdean, a new duty waited me, which I did not like at all. Parliament had been dissolved, and the whole county was plunged into the turmoil of a contested election. For the first time since Peter had represented Mallerdean, his seat there was disputed.

Captain Moffat, who had often accepted our hospitality, and who was a great favourite with Lady Lanton, appeared in Mallerdean as the Tory candidate.

For once Lady Lanton and I were agreed in our sentiments. We could not find words sufficiently strong to express our indignation; while Peter added to our discomfiture by laughing at us for being angry.

"I really believe that boy has some sense in him," remarked Lady Lanton, as she saw Buffy belabouring an effigy stuffed out in his old nankin suit, and placarded "Captin Moppit." The first words she had spoken in his favour.

The present age can form no idea of the excitement, the hatred, the rancour engendered by a contested election. Not the smallest child

in Mallerdean was free from the feeling ; all the women, even the meekest, shyest, were full of enthusiasm on one side or the other. Political squibs flew right and left—some good, some bad, some atrocious. Private family matters, a personal defect, a foolish habit, were shown up with a merciless exposure that was disgraceful. We neither ate, drank, nor slept in peace. As for Peter, I saw nothing of him ; he went off early, and came home late. If by chance he dined with us, some rough, uncouth voter would drop in, as if by accident, and must perforce be asked to dine ; or an urgent message would come from the committee, desiring his instant presence.

Lady Lanton entered heart and soul into the struggle. Proud, reserved, and uncivil at other times, she was now urbanity itself. Surrounded by people who repelled me, she knew how to gain them over. She charmed them by a graciousness of manner, and an agreeableness, that were the more admired because so unusual, but which led them to fancy she had secretly cherished a fancy for every one of them. She was interested in their babies ; she promised their daughters patterns of her London dresses and spencers ; she begged receipts of the mothers for the instruction of the housekeeper at Mallerdean. They could not believe they had ever thought her proud or disagreeable. I was understood to come of a homely family, but my Lady Lanton was a born woman of fashion—a real, true, fine lady—and it was astonishing how much flattered they felt by her notice, and how they found their vanity soothed by the recollection of her right to be proud !

Captain Moffat was a dangerous rival. He brought with him not only a very fair portion of the wealthy and aristocratic influence of our county, but he was unscrupulous as regarded taking every advantage. He knew that Peter would no more ask a man for his vote a second time, after being told it was promised, than he would try to steal a purse. Not so Captain Moffat. He pressed, he bribed, he persecuted, he persisted, until, from sheer worry, he gained the vote. Even now I hate his very name, and Buffy was very anxious to shoot “Moppit.”

As the time approached for the polling, our work became harder and more disagreeable. Lady Lanton was never out of Mallerdean. Seeing my distaste to canvassing, and, indeed, uselessness at that work, Lady Lanton recommended that I should be sent to a wild sort of hamlet, where a polling booth was established for the hill farmers, and those who had Common rights. There was no regular road to it, and Peter was rather averse to my going ; but the increasing excitement of the election had its effect upon him, and, with many a caution and tender word, Buffy and I started in an open carriage, to go electioneering after the best fashion we could. He was in wild spirits, with a huge blue cockade in his hat ; our horses were decked with blue ribbons, and we had a couple of outriders to assist us on our road. Lady Lanton gave us all sorts of instructions, and Peter all kinds of

cautions, and they both credited us with perfect success before we had even started. Half-way up we were to call upon a yeoman who was a sort of king among his fellows, and who was supposed to carry with him a score of good votes.

The road was rough, and our progress slow. Many times the carriage had to be lifted out of the ruts, and at others we went over the bare common without a track at all. We had progressed about five miles, when we came upon a group of men, resting, but evidently on their way to the same place as ourselves. In the midst of them was a man lying on a litter. Upon inquiry, we learnt that the sufferer was Farmer Green, who had broken his leg ten days before, accidentally, but, having a vote, he must needs go and give it, and take care another time to "happen his accidents" at a more convenient moment. Thus spoke the man who seemed to have charge of the party.

Immediately my indignation burst forth. I concluded, from the unfeeling manner in which my informant spoke, regardless of the evident suffering of the poor man, that this was a vote for Captain Moffat.

"Shame ! shame !" I cried. "The man's life is in danger."

"Same ! same !" echoed Buffy, who still lisped, and our servants repeated it still louder.

But what was our confusion when we learnt that this was a Mallerdean vote—a true blue—and that they were carrying him to the polling-booth, in obedience to stringent orders from Lady Lanton.

Anxious as Farmer Green might be to give his vote for the Squire, he was not at all desirous of endangering his life by being carried to the polling-booth. There was not a man among the voters more disgusted with himself than he was, not with breaking his leg, but doing it at such a time.

"I am a-most mad wi' myself," said he, as I wiped the drops of pain from his brow. "It's a fullish thing, at all toimes, to slip and crack wi' bones, but to go for to do it at this identical time is a hugeous mortification."

But Lady Lanton had sent word that go he must, and if he died in consequence he was to take care and poll before he did so.

Now, no one in those days regarded this as cruel. Instantly the servants changed their tone, and began to encourage him, saying he would do very well, he had plenty of pluck, and they would not mind it if they was he.

"I doin't moind a smattering o' pain, but this be a kind o' turtuous business, as I have heerd tell folks happened under bad kings. It 'ull be my death, I'll be bound !"

"No ! no !" I broke in. "You shall not die—you shall not go farther. Mr. Mallerdean would rather lose his election than suffer such a risk."

The poor man's face brightened.

"I wadn't moind, but for Sally and the young 'uns. To be tied be the leg is bad enuf, but to dee will be joost the finish of 'em."

"Take him back," I exclaimed, "he shall not go a yard farther."  
 "Some on us is voters, Ma'am, we mun get on. M'appen thou'st be quiet by ty roadside, till we be back, Green."  
 "I am wanting my bed, and Sally," answered Green, faintly.  
 "How far does he live from here?"  
 "Hard upon two mile."  
 "Then lift him into the carriage, and I will take him back."  
 "Mother Hubbard, that will make us very late. Send the two servants with him, and let us ride on their horses."  
 "There is no side-saddle," remarked one.  
 "Oh, I shall not care for that. Now, make haste—place him in. Are you easy, Green? do you feel comfortable? Mind you go a foot's pace, and let the carriage wait there for me; I shall want to know before I go home that he is no worse."

## CHAPTER XXIV

### CANVASSING.

**M**Y orders were obeyed with alacrity. I was well pleased with them, for the poor man was now so weakened and ill as to shed tears. We watched him on the way, and I was glad to see the servants were most careful of him. Then Buffy and I mounted, both our horses led by one of the men. In another mile we came to the house at which I was to call. The yeoman, Miles by name, came out to greet me, and though he was surprised to see me riding after that fashion, he said nothing. He was an unmarried man, and there was only one woman servant about the place; but he did his best to make me welcome. A hasty repast was put on the table, which consisted of bread and cheese, and two large pies, one of meat and one of apples. Buffy and I ate as if we had never tasted anything so good. He offered me spirits and cider to drink, and pressed me very much to taste his port wine. Anxious to prove my powers of canvassing, I accepted a glass; and, on swallowing half of it in a hurry, was nearly choked. In his anxiety to be truly hospitable, he had mistaken the bottles, and given me British brandy instead of port wine.

Of course I concluded it would get into my head, and I tried to recall all the first symptoms of tipsiness that I might prepare myself for the dreadful finale. But not feeling much at present, I took the opportunity, while I was able, to ask for his vote.

"He had not exactly promised it to the Tories, but he had as good as done so. He warn't altogether pleased with the Whigs. They would not let well alone. Farmers were beginning to make a bit of their wheat, and things was looking pretty warlike; and they would

be making fortunes with war prices. He did not know but as Muster Pitt managed well enuf. And Pitt should have his support, whatever it might be."

Considering I had lost a vote by Green, I ought to have argued the matter with Miles, instead of which I mounted my horse, which now had a side-saddle borrowed of him, and took my leave. It was doubtless very wrong of me, but in truth, still in fear about the brandy, having heard that much talking promoted the bad effect, I was silent from prudence.

Having a side-saddle, I would no longer be led, so I took the opportunity of asking Buffy if he had any experience as to doses of brandy and their effects. He seemed very learned on the matter, and comforted me much by saying I should probably do nothing foolish, but only have a headache.

"Papa drinks tumblers of it, and I always know when he has had too much, because his head is tied up in a wet cloth."

"I am afraid I can't try that remedy, Buffy."

"No, Mother Hubbard, and you don't want it, for you don't look in the least like papa when he is tipsy."

Re-assured, we cantered gaily along, and encountered no other adventures until we came to a broad shallow stream that divided us from the hamlet where the polling-booth was erected, and which now swarmed with people, as if it was a fair day. In the middle of the stream, which was something flooded, was a long piece of shingly ground, forming an island with two or three shrubs on it. Underneath one of them a man was seated, looking most disconsolate.

We were glad to see that true blue was the favourite colour among the people. Buffy had given his fine cockade to Mr. Miles's maid, and the men who had been with Green begged the ribbons off our horses' heads to decorate themselves; so that Buffy and I showed no outward signs of our political bias.

As we neared the ford, where the disconsolate man was lying under the bush, he said to me in a subdued voice,

"I say, my lass, give me a lift to the shore; I will make it worth your while."

"I will do it for thanks only," I answered, and guided my horse towards him.

He made one spring on it behind me, and as we appeared from behind the bush, a sudden roar among the people frightened me.

"Don't fear," he said, "they are only roaring at me; the whole of this day have they kept me on that island, my horse having laid down in the stream and upset me. They are nothing but Mallerdeans up here, and they did not want to have a yellow vote amongst them; but thanks to you, my pretty lass, I can poll now, and my vote's a plumper."

Here was a pretty to-do. Entrusted with a responsible situation, sent on purpose to a polling place to beguile, to entice, to persuade

people to vote for true blue, here had I prevented one of our own men from polling, and helped a notorious enemy to record his vote.

"You shall not be forgotten, I can tell you, my dear," continued this odious yellow man, who now began to act upon me as the old man of the sea did upon Sinbad the sailor.

I thought, Shall I turn my horse in deep water, and half drown myself, drowning him? What could I say to all the true blues? Finally, I considered it best to put a good face on the matter, and let people take it for granted that I knew who he was, an enemy; and that with a magnanimity which might be provoking, but still was truly great, I had helped mine enemy to my own disadvantage.

"What is your name, my pretty one, that I may tell Captain Moffat. It is a good five pound in your pocket, let me whisper to you."

"Keep the five pounds, my friend, and tell Captain Moffat that Mrs. Mallerdean, of Mallerdean, helped you to record your vote."

The man dropped from the horse as if shot. We were now on land, and I had rather a noisy greeting.

However, when one has made a mistake, and the thing is done, it is no use lamenting. I did my best to make up, though there was little need, for, as the yellow man had said, they were Mallerdean men—all.

Riding home I said to Buffy,

"Well, Buffy, except for poor Green, I think, for any good I have done, I had better have stayed at home."

"No, Mother Hubbard, you are wrong, you did a great deal of good. I heard the people saying what a beauty you were, and so sweet-tempered, and that no one had seen, as they call it, the likes of you up there."

"But still, Buffy, I shall have to tell your mother I sent Green back, I failed to get Miles's vote, and I helped a great enemy over the water. You don't think she will be pleased to hear all that, do you?"

"No, she will be in a rage. I wouldn't tell her if I was you."

"But I think I must tell your uncle."

"How he will laugh! I don't like being laughed at. Don't tell anyone, Mother Hubbard."

I shook my head. I was morally certain that the moment I was questioned the whole thing would come out. However, there was consolation in the thought that I had seen Green very comfortable in bed, and very grateful for being there.

"You see, mum," said his wife, who cried her gratitude, "it was not the journey up, thaten warn't what I feared. But mostly the folks will be in drink, and to think as my poor helpless man was to be carried all those miles by men as couldn't carry theysels, was a tremenjous hidee. Oh! mum, on my knees I thank ye, and may the Lord grant the Squire his wish, and mak him a Parliament man! So I pray night and day, I'll never miss it until my John is oop ag'in. And Ise warrant as he'll be at his Maker wi' the same axing."



The excitement of the day made Buffy and me fall asleep in the carriage, and I never awoke until I heard the peal of our own door bell, and saw Peter with an anxious face peering through the dark air, to see that I was safe. As he half carried me into the hall he upbraided himself for ever permitting me to go.

However, our nap had done us good, and if it had not been for what we had to tell, Buffy and I should have been in such good spirits, and so excited, that Peter would have seen we had suffered no harm.

I ran up first to see and kiss my little Peter, to smooth my hair and change my dress, and then, seated at the great Peter's knee, I was cross-questioned, and all came out.

But of course Peter was pleased with what I had done about Green. That I knew he would be. Lady Lanton scowled fearfully, but in her brother's presence she dared not do more.

When I told about the brandy and my fears, Peter laughed. When I stammered out the tale of the yellow man he looked grave, and Lady Lanton flung herself out of the room.

"Don't look so sorrowful, my pet," said Peter, who, by-the-bye, looked very fagged and ill. "I know the man you helped over, and I looked grave because he is an ill-conditioned brute. He will take his advantage out of the matter—and let him. All I want is to see that sweetest, dearest face look happy again. Why, my wife, do you think I value my seat in Parliament—the gaining this election—the triumph of my party—one jot in comparison with a smile from you?"

"Do you value your pretty toy so highly as that?" I exclaimed, radiant and exulting.

"My pretty toy! So that phrase rankles in my girl's mind, does it?"

"I think it does, Peter."

"What shall I do or say to remove it from your mind? Dulce, I cannot let you go canvassing any more. You don't know how desolate I felt when I returned home, tired and pining for her, and no sweet wife-face to greet me. I had to go for little Peter to comfort me."

"Did you? And you took him in your arms and nursed him?"

"Yes, I took him in my arms; I talked to him of his mother, and I cooed to him, and coaxed him, and finally (it is true, Dulce) put him to sleep."

"Then I will no more remember that about the toy. I am the mother of your son, the first baby you ever nursed. That will suffice me—I want no other title."

"Oh! child, how full you are of the gentle thoughts of love! To me, world-wise and world-worn, there is such a charm in these simple but most natural ideas, that you will end in making me the most fond, foolish, ridiculous——"

"Dearest, best of husbands! Don't you know, Peter, that if you

did not show your appreciation of such little things, I should shut them up in my heart, and be afraid to utter them?"

"I will take care to provoke them. Trust me."

Sad to say, Peter's prognostications about the villainous disposition of the yellow man proved true. The whole of Mallerdean was placarded with a caricature of "Simple Mrs. M—ll—d—n going a canvassing." There was a picture of a most silly, gaping-looking woman, with a certain sort of resemblance to me, extending an eager hand to help "a yellow boy" to jump behind her on the horse—crowds of "true blues," expressing all the various kinds of rage and disappointment of which the human frame is capable, on the bank. Peter turned white with rage, and rode up the street, without one look at me, seated in the carriage with his sister.

She turned upon me with the bitterest sarcasm. Buffy in tears, half in anger at his mother, half in pain for me, threw his arms round me, and kissed me again and again in sight of all the people.

But in a moment Peter returned, and, his dear face glowing with tenderness and love, he stretched out his hand, and said to me quite loud,

"Never mind, my love, I am proud that you assisted even 'a yellow boy' from a disagreeable position."

And the people near us shouted as he said it, crying, "Mrs. Mallerdean for ever."

It was the last day of the election, I was thankful for that without anything more. I did not like feeling sensations of envy, hatred, and malice, and I could not help them.

Our anxiety was tremendous. At the last moment, as he said, "much against his will," the Lord-Lieutenant brought his powerful interest in favour of Captain Moffat. One could not blame him, for his principles were "Tory," and Captain Moffat was his relation.

As regards the two candidates themselves, Peter's influence in the county was very well known—people were habituated to him. In fact, he was so familiar to them all, that the charm of novelty was wanting to assist his canvass. Handsome and well-looking as he was, I could not but acknowledge that Captain Moffat surpassed him in personal appearance. He was really a remarkably fine man, with a suavity of manner and a persuading, smooth voice, that might have wiled a bird from a tree.

There is no power so great among the crowd as novelty. Accustomed to Mr. Mallerdean's short, rather stern manner, the people gave way at once to the charm of Captain Moffat's gentle, persuading tones, and the pleading tenacity with which he argued and argued, until, for very shame, they could not, as they thought, refuse, after he had taken so much trouble.

Stunned with the uproar, faint-hearted at seeing Peter's face gradually settling into gloom, I begged to go home. Just as my husband

had consented, we heard a cheer from a distance, a clattering of horses' feet, the crowd opened, and made way for the yeoman "Miles," who, waving that horrid caricature of me and the yellow man in his hand, shouted,

"A cheer for the lady, the kindest-hearted, noblest lady. Long life to Mrs. Mallerdean! Here, at my back, are twenty votes for Mrs. Mallerdean—she who is so tender-hearted to the sick, and so noble to the enemy. Good day, ma'am," he continued, taking off his hat as he got close to the carriage; "here are my votes, ma'am, twenty on 'em, all for you. No need to ask who we're to poll for. Be off, men, time's nearly up, and vote for Mallerdean! The lady for ever!"

And the people, taking up the shout, roared louder than ever. As for me, I leant back in the carriage and cried heartily.

Peter won the election by eleven votes. Buffy and I were applauded and petted to our hearts' content.

In talking over the election that evening, I could not help saying,

"I did not feel, after all, so obliged to Miles."

"Why not?" asked Peter.

"I should have liked him better had he given the votes to me at once when I asked him."

"That is, woman-like, you would rather they had been given to me unconditionally than to you from admiration."

"Perhaps, but you know he said he was half promised—I don't like breaking promises."

"That was your ignorance," remarked Lady Lanton; "he was only hanging back, as all these vulgar people do, to make you entreat him."

"I hardly think so, Emma; indeed, if she had pressed him too much, I should have lost his votes. He is an odd man, is Miles. I fancy the gentleness with which Dulce took his refusal touched him. You know how expressive her countenance is—how much it tells, let her be ever so silent. Well! I was told that the disappointment caused by his refusal was so visible on her face, that though she said nothing, he was quite hurt in himself at it. Immediately after she had gone, his servants all crowded round him, to tell how good she had been about Green—not only sending him back, but riding one of the servants' horses, in a man's saddle, to let Green have the carriage. Also when he, not being accustomed to ladies' visits, in his confusion gave her brandy instead of port wine, she never showed the least discomposure, 'no more than if he had never done it.' Between you and me, Dulce, I don't suppose you had any escape, as regards the port wine. I can't fancy Yeoman Miles having good port."

"He said he had, and prided himself on it."

"Well, some day, we will go and taste it, you and I."

"Yes, I must thank him for his votes, though I have told you I don't feel so grateful as I ought."

"He certainly gave them to you, and you only. He told me him-

self he was immensely taken with the feeling that prompted you to give a lift to the yellow boy."

"I did not know he was yellow when I did it."

"No more did I," said Buffy, pompously, "or I should not have permitted Mother Hubbard to do it."

"It struck the fancy of Miles, though, and he came down, intending if he saw you, Dulce, in Mallerdean, to make up to you, with a view to get you to ask him once more for his votes. But when he saw the caricature he could not contain himself. He ordered his followers to seize all they could find, and, unable to control himself, he shouted his opinions all through the streets, until he finally relieved them by plumping all his votes for Mallerdean."

"So you see, Mother Hubbard, we have been the best canvassers after all!" cried Buffy.

"Go to bed, child—what business have you here?" said his mother.

"It may be as Buffy says," I remarked, "but I hope we shall never have another election. If we have, Peter, you must send me away until it is over."

"I will not encounter another," he answered, "for I never intend to part from my wife, except from necessity; and I am not justified in spending so much money merely for a seat in Parliament."

"But, Mallerdean, a true patriot ought to sacrifice everything to his country."

"To die for her, my dear Emma, is a plain duty; and one I can do, if required. But to spend thirty thousand pounds merely to pander to the evil passions of men, is a deed I will never commit again. Could I hope that this vast sum will benefit the needy or deserving in Mallerdean, I would not begrudge it. But I feel pretty sure it has fallen into those hands that will make a very evil use of it. Mallerdean is ruined in its morals for some time. It will take years to recover the effects of this contest. But one never thinks of these things until too late."

I could not help feeling glad that Peter thought as badly of the election as I did.

Soon after the election, Peter and I and Buffy carried out our intention of visiting Miles. We sent him word of our coming—that he might, if he liked, make preparation for us. On our road we called at Green's cottage. The poor fellow was getting better—he was still in bed—but the doctor who had attended him at our desire gave us a good account of him. The wife came out to meet us. "Ah, my lady," said she, "glad and proud were Green and me that you did not lose your election through your goodness to us. My man and I pray for you every day of our lives. You will be happy if you get all the good that is wished you—not by us alone, but by all the county!"

Peter spoke with Green, and I distributed my gifts to the wife and children. Then we continued our journey up the country. Miles received us at the gate. He had put on his Sunday coat; his best

parlour had a fire lighted, and a repast was spread, combining all the merits of breakfast, dinner, tea, and supper, with the graces of luncheon and light refreshments included! Old-fashioned glasses, engraved with Freemason emblems; the port wine on which he prided himself was in a massive old decanter; whilst rum and Hollands stood sedately in old Dutch bottles, which looked as though they had come out of a picture by Jan Stein or Teniers.

"Well," said Peter, "my wife insisted on coming to thank you for your help in need, and your chivalry in defending her from that horrid caricature."

"All right, Squire, all right. I should not have been either a man or a Briton if I had not come out for her. Oh, Squire, your wife is a right good lady!—she deserves to be a Mallerdean! But come, madam, and sit down to table—and you, young master, you shall not have brandy in mistake again! This tea, I reckon, will be more in your way. It is real good, I believe, though I don't much matter it myself; but it did come from China, I know, for it was sent me as a present by a sea-captain from those parts."

I sat down and began to make tea. Miles carved delicate slices of the pink and white ham; Buffy looked approvingly at the plum-cake, and I enjoyed the sweet, fresh, home-made bread and butter, and beautiful cream.

When we were able to escape from the hospitable importunities of Miles—to satisfy them would have been impossible for mortal powers of eating and drinking—the old servant cleared the table. Peter delighted Miles by taking some of the cordial that was in one of the quaint Dutch bottles, and I admired the ornaments of the room. There was a portrait on the walls, roughly done, but with some artistic skill, of a young man in uniform. The head was spirited, and gave the expression of a face of combined force and courage, but shadowed with a certain look of sombre defiance.

"Who is that, Miles?" said Peter; "a relation of yours?"

"No, Squire, no relation—only a brother in heart and soul."

"I am sure there is a history about that portrait," said I. "Do tell it to me; for I dearly love a story, and I am sure that young man was a hero."

"Ay, Miles, tell her the tale, if you have one—I am always fain to do what she asks me! I would like to hear the history too. Where did you live before you came here?"


"Well, Mrs. Mallerdean shall never be disappointed of anything I can do to please her. It is a long story, but it is a curious one—maybe the young gentleman would like to go and look about him?"

"Which will you do, Buffy?" said I. "Will you stay and hear the story? or will you go and play in the farmyard?"

Buffy gravely expressed his preference for remaining where he was; and Miles, having declined Peter's suggestion of lighting his pipe, began his story, which is, I think, worth recording.

## CHAPTER XXV

## MILES'S STORY.

“HEN I was a boy, I lived with my father and mother, in a little cottage, in a village in Warwickshire. He was a farm-labourer; my mother had enough to do with her family; but at harvest and hay-time she worked in the fields, and what she earned was a great help. She had a good many children, but one way or other they all died except me and my brother. I think I should have gone like the rest, if it had not been for a neighbour's son named George, who was most uncommon kind to me; he helped my mother to nurse me when I was ill of a fever, and he was good to me ever after. He was some years older than I, and what made him take to me, I am sure I cannot tell, but that I should love him in return is no wonder at all. I worshipped him, and that is the only word to use for it. He used to tell me no end of stories about robbers and wild beasts; but, above all, about battles. He used to make me windmills, and boats, and kites, and gave me endless balls of string and knives; but what I cared for most of all was, that he let me follow him about wherever he went, and take his dinner to him out in the fields, and sent me on all his errands. I felt very proud to go, for I would have laid myself down under his feet if he had wanted me. Though I was quite a little chap, he used to talk to me as if I were his equal. He told me how he hated a dull country life, and how he longed to go away, and to seek his fortune in distant parts. He would have enlisted for a soldier, if it had not been for his mother, who would have broken her heart. She was a meek, good woman, who had been tyrannised over by a brutal husband, who had been groom to a gentleman. He broke his neck trying to break in a vicious horse. Although being drunk at the time, it was his own fault, the gentleman pensioned the widow; so that George had all the money he earned for himself. He did not take after his father, but held himself aloof from the other fellows in the village, and never set foot in an ale-house—not from pride, but because he took pleasure in other things. He was always studying at one thing or other every leisure moment; especially he tried to pick up all he could about battles, and he used to draw plans of battles upon an old slate.

“At last a change came over him—a sort of fever—and he grew desponding and unhappy. He used to talk to me a great deal, but I could only feel very sorry for him, I could say nothing to comfort him. His mother, poor body, saw that all was not right, and feared he would take after his father; she used to preach to him out of the catechism, and tell him it was his duty to be content in

the state of life to which he was born; it was all very good, but not suitable to his case. He hated his occupation, and yet, oddly enough, it was only in his work he seemed to find any relief. He did as much as three men, and then asked for more.

"Well, the truth must come out at last—George turned poacher. Poaching is a breach of the law of the land. I say no more about that; but I believe myself, that gentlemen who have a regular licence to shoot, and who preserve their own game, have not half the enjoyment in a whole season's shooting that there is in one night's good poaching. However, you see poaching has this drawback—the fellows who take to poaching leave off honest hard work; they slink out of daylight, and haunt public-houses, and take to low idle habits of every kind. The love of adventure kills the habit of steady-going industry. They would do capitally out in the Australian bush or at the diggings; but they plague the life out of churchwardens, overseers, constables, and squires. So they make a mess of it, and get into trouble, which is a pity, for you would not believe what fine, likely young fellows many of them are to begin with.

"George, for his part, was too proud, and respected himself too much, to fall into disreputable ways. He never would take me with him; though, when I saw him preparing his tackle and cleaning his gun, I used to beg very hard that he would let me go; but he was always quite stern and resolved. However, he used to let me help him to take care of his things, and I was very proud to do that. We made a hiding-place under some furze bushes, where no keepers would think of looking, and where everything could be kept quite dry. I had the charge of his dog, too—a knowing sensible brute, who loved the sport as much as his master; he was a strong, lean, yellow, cross-bred dog, with long hair and a feather tail; he knew as well as we did that he must keep quiet during the day, and, though I sometimes did my best to 'tice him, I could never prevail upon him to have a game of play. As soon as he had eaten his dinner, he would curl himself up, with his nose under his tail, and go off to sleep as sensible as a Christian; he knew that his master would give him exercise enough at night. We had made a place for him to live in under the bushes close by where the tackle was kept, and we knew that nobody could meddle with it so long as he was there.

"Things went on this way for some months. George's mother, who had always been ailing, fell into a kind of waste, and the doctors said she could not last long. George was always a good son, and he watched and waited on his mother like a woman. He would not have had her know anything of his going out at nights for the world; and, though it was well known in the village, the neighbours had too much good feeling to tell her. George was greatly cut up by his mother's illness, but he told me that when she was taken he would not stay in the place a day, but would go for a soldier. I nearly broke my heart when he said this, but he comforted me by saying that he would send

for me, and we should share our fortunes together. But this was not to be.

"One night a party of men asked George to head them on an expedition into the woods of Lord Capelcurry, where there was to be a battue the next day. Of course all the keepers were on the alert, but that was a temptation rather than not. George asked me to be with his mother for that evening, and to read to her, to keep her from asking questions. I consented, though I would much rather have gone with the party.

"I saw George go away, and then went to the cottage of his mother, to whom I told a natural story to account for his absence. She soon grew weary of the reading, and talked and maundered on about former days, before she was married, and about her first meeting with her husband, and how much he was in love with her, and what a good husband he had been before he was led astray by bad company. I was thinking of George, but I was a good listener, and remained with her till she went to bed, and then I went home. Early the next morning I was awakened by bad news. There had been a desperate affray with the poachers the night before; one of Lord Capelcurry's keepers was killed, and another seriously wounded. All the poachers had made their escape except George, who had been taken, and was dreadfully hurt. The news spread like wildfire; the constables were abroad; three of the poachers were secured, but the others managed to find safe hiding. It was impossible to keep the news from George's mother, and you may fancy the misery it caused. I was nearly frantic, and walked all the way to the gaol in the next town, which was fifteen miles off, in the hopes of seeing George. Of course I was not admitted, but I learned that he was in the infirmary, and his wounds were doing well. I was nearly mad. I could have beaten down the gates to get at him; and when I was turned away, I thought I would set the town on fire to revenge him. Some friends of the other men who had been taken were very kind to me, and kept me from doing mischief to myself or any one else.

"There lived in the town a very clever man, who was looked up to as a sort of prisoner's friend; for if a man got into trouble, Mr. Messent was always ready to take his part; and he often got a prisoner off when there had not seemed a chance in the world for him. We all went to him and told him our case. He spoke kindly, and seemed to be very sorry about George and the other men. He talked of the game-laws in a way that was a real comfort to us, and we went home in better heart. All the village joined to help to pay the money for the defence. After Mr. Messent had been admitted to see the prisoners, he drove over to our village to collect evidence and examine witnesses. He called to see George's mother. He brought her a message from her son. He brought me a kind word from him too. Altogether he kept up our spirits wonderfully.

"When at last the assizes came on, George was recovered enough to



take his trial. All the prisoners were found guilty, and George was declared to be the one who fired the shot that had been the actual cause of the gamekeeper's death. The judge, in his address, declared it to be one of the most aggravated cases he had ever tried, and called upon the prisoners to rejoice in the lenity of the sentence ; which was that George was to be transported for the term of his natural life, and all the others for fourteen years. I saw George once for one moment. I, and the friends of the other prisoners, were allowed to stand in the yard as they were conveyed to the van. I sprang forwards and grasped one of his hands. He said cheerfully :

“ ‘ Good-bye, old fellow ; we will meet again ! ’ ”

“ George's mother never looked up again : she died before the week was out. The gang of poachers was entirely broken up, and Lord Capelcurry and his keepers had their hares and partridges in peace. The keepers had killed George's dog, but I gathered together all the odd matters that had belonged to him, and which nobody disputed with me. I then turned my back upon the place where I had lived, and went to seek for work elsewhere.

“ I might have been then about sixteen. The gardener at Squire Munsford's had married my mother's sister, so I went there first, to see if he could give me a place. It was ten miles on the other side of the village where all these things had taken place. Both he and my aunt received me very kindly. I was made under-gardener and helper to my uncle. It was a good place, and I lived there for five years. My uncle was a Scotchman, and he took pains with my learning ; for he was a man of some education himself. At the end of that time he went to be head-gardener to Sir Robert Palmer, and I was promoted by Squire Munsford to his place. This was considered a great piece of good luck, and so it was ; but you see, I only cared for one thing in this world, and that was to save money enough to be able to join George across the water. I went home sometimes to see my father and mother at the old place. My brother—I told you I had one—did not turn out comfortably, and ended by running away to sea ; so I had to help the old people, which kept me from saving so much as I might otherwise have done. One time, when I was down there, I heard a rumour that George had escaped from the gang of convicts, and had got clear off, along with two others, after killing the overseer. This statement had made the round of the newspapers ; yet, Botany Bay was so far off, no one could rightly tell whether to believe this or not ; but everybody who had known him wished George well ; and, after I had been gardener it might be about ten years, Madame Munsford died, and the Squire broke up his establishment and went to live in another part of England.

“ I was left in charge of the place with a man under me to keep the grounds in order ; and an old servant was left in the house. After Squire Munsford's death—which followed that of his wife in

a couple of years—the place came into the market to be sold ; and the estate was divided into lots, some of which went with the house, and others separate. A good many parties came to view the house ; but for some it was too large, and for others too small, and, from one cause or another, it remained a couple of years unlet. One morning, as I was mowing the lawn, I saw a grand travelling-carriage stop before the gate. A gentleman who was inside beckoned me to come to him. I went ; but when I reached the window I nearly dropped down with surprise, for I surely believed it was George himself I saw before me.

The gentleman took no notice of my looks, but quietly asked if he could be shewn over the house—he had a card to view it. He alighted, and I walked behind him like a person in a dream ; the more I looked at the stranger, the more perplexed I was with the resemblance. He was evidently a military man, and had the mark of a sabre-cut across his forehead. He addressed me as a perfect stranger, and asked me many questions, which I answered without well knowing what I said. That George should have become a gentleman and ride in his carriage, was quite likely enough ; but I felt sure that, however grand he might become, he would never change towards me. At last he drove away, and I did not know whether to feel glad or sorry.

“A few days afterwards he returned, accompanied by a man of business ; and, after much examination of documents and comparing of deeds, Major Rutherford (as George's Double was called) became the owner of the house and certain lots of land lying around : a nice compact little property it was. The furniture was old-fashioned, and would have fetched nothing at a sale ; but it suited the house, and was convenient as well as appropriate. This was taken at a small valuation, and thus, at a stroke, Major Rutherford took his place amongst the county gentry. Before they departed, I was called into the room, and received the offer to become Major Rutherford's bailiff. The lawyer—who had been Squire Munsford's man of business—said he had recommended me ; but I did not think that had anything to do with my appointment. Ever since I had heard of George's escape, I had felt unsettled in my grand purpose ; and now, though I could not make the Major out to my satisfaction, I felt quite content to stop with him.

“If I had expected the Major to be like what I recollected of George, I was much mistaken. He was like George, certainly ; but it was George possessed by a devil. All the gloomy, moody discontent which had overshadowed him in the latter days of our intercourse, seemed to be hardened and exaggerated in the Major into a bitter grinding sense of wrong and injustice. He had evidently lived a stormy, adventurous life ; and, although he had conquered fortune and position, yet he was scornful and contemptuous—unthankful, one might say, for all the comforts and advantages he had won in his battle of life. It was

understood that he was a gentleman by birth, of good though decayed family ; that he had entered the East India Company's service when very young, and had won his promotion by heading more than one forlorn hope. The means by which he had obtained his fortune was not exactly known ; but men in those days always made their fortunes in the East. The neighbouring gentlemen all called upon him, but his opinions and theirs clashed at all points : they were all good, steady Church and King men, Tories of the old school. The Major had brought home with him startling political notions about reform in Parliament and extension of the suffrage, which he propounded with a reckless audacity that nearly sent some of his most respectable visitors into fits of apoplexy. He also took the earliest opportunity of quarrelling with the rector of the parish, who was a magistrate as well as a clergyman ; and, in that capacity, had committed three men for some trifling trespass upon his own property. The Major declared that this was a most unchristian proceeding, and refused to attend church. The large family pew in the pretty village church consequently remained untenanted Sunday after Sunday, to the intense disgust of the rector, and the great scandal of the country-side. But the crowning act of his unpopularity was that, at a supper which he gave to the tenants and farmers on his estate, he announced his intention of not preserving his game, and gave them all free permission to kill whatever they found on their own land.

"This proceeding was in such direct opposition to the customs of the county, that the gentry looked upon it as a reflection upon them, and resented it accordingly. They all cut the Major, and spoke of him as an infidel, a Jacobin, and a revolutionary democrat. The Major took all this with great indifference, and seemed, indeed, to enjoy exasperating their prejudices. To his own tenants he made a kind but strictly just landlord ; all the fences, farm-houses, and buildings were kept in perfect repair, the cottages of the labourers were rebuilt. He showed the greatest desire to make the condition of all who depended on him as good as possible ; but, in spite of the substantial benefits he conferred, he was anything but popular : he was too much of a reformer, and made no allowance for the natural unwillingness of men to walk in new ways. He liked to be in the opposition, and would any day have preferred to fight for his own way, rather than obtain it uncontested.

"As for myself, I was much attached to him, partly for his own sake, and partly for the sake of old times, which he so strangely brought back to me, though he never, by the most trivial word or deed, recognised any former state of intercourse. A year passed on without any remarkable occurrence ; but then there befell a curious adventure. The Major and I went to attend an agricultural dinner that took place in the next town, which is a cathedral town. As we returned home, it was a bright moonlight night. The streets were deserted, everybody was in bed ; but as we drove past the cathedral I distinctly saw a figure

at one of the lower windows fluttering a handkerchief, and I fancied I heard a faint voice cry, 'Help!' I do not believe in ghosts, but I confess my heart beat thick.

"Good heaven!" said the Major, 'some one has been buried alive, and is trying to escape!'

"More likely some poor mad creature who has escaped from confinement, and has hidden herself there."

"Again we heard the cry of 'Help!'

"The Major sprang from the gig. I did not like him to go alone, but the horse was young and spirited, and could not be left.

"The Major soon returned. 'We must find out the sexton,' said he hastily; 'it is a poor young woman who has been locked in by accident. She seems to be nearly mad with fear.'

"There was not a soul to be seen about. We did not the least in the world know where the keys were kept; but we were obliged to do something. After knocking up several wrong people, who did not bestow blessings upon for our pains, we at length discovered the clerk, and with some difficulty got him and his lantern into the street. The Major and he went together to the cathedral, and I remained with the gig. They soon returned, carrying between them a young girl, who seemed to be dead. They took her into the house, and the clerk's wife came downstairs; lights appeared in the various houses whose inmates we had disturbed, and night-capped heads were popped out of the windows to see what had happened. One or two, more curious than the rest, came into the street, to learn the rights of the case. As soon as the poor girl was sufficiently recovered to be able to speak, she told us that she had come from Sutton-Cosely that day with a party of friends for a day's shopping, and to see the monuments in the cathedral. While she was looking at one of the tombs, her party passed on, and, when she turned round, she saw them leaving the building. She called, but no one heard; in her haste her foot slipped, and she fell down against a pillar, and cut her brow—before she could rise she heard the ponderous doors clang together, and the key turn in the lock. At first she thought they would miss her and return; but time passed on, and they did not come. She beat against the door, but could make no one hear. Evening closed in, she grew desperate at the prospect of remaining there all night. The last thing she recollected was climbing to a window and breaking the glass to attract attention. Poor thing, it was no wonder she was frightened at the prospect of remaining in that great, dark, lonely place, full of graves! I should not have liked it myself.

"The Major decided that we would drive her home, late as it was, to save her friends further anxiety. She was well wrapped up, and we took her between us in the gig.

"She lived about five miles across the country, in an old moated farm house that had been once a manor-house. It was now a dim,

ghostly-looking place, built of grey stone, and half unoccupied. As we drove down the lane that led to the house, we saw a number of persons moving about in great excitement. The sound of our vehicle called some persons to the door. Foremost among them was the farmer, holding a candle above his head, and his other hand shading his eyes; behind him were the maid-servants. I could feel the poor girl shrink closer to us when he appeared.

"We have brought back your daughter, Mr. Byrne," said the Major, speaking first. "We have been so fortunate as to rescue her from a very unpleasant situation."

"Where hast thou been to, wench?" asked the father, sternly. "Go to bed with you, huzzy—a pretty disgrace you are to your family! And who may you gentlemen be?" said he, turning upon us. "How do I know that you have not made up a story amongst you, to get me to receive the girl back, when she may deserve no better than to be thrown out of the window!"

"The Major was struck dumb at such an address; but I, to whom the brutal violent character of Farmer Byrne was well known, knew better how to deal with him. In a few words I made him understand that this sort of thing would not answer. He subsided into a surly civility, and gave us grudging thanks, that seemed to choke him in the utterance. On our road home I told Major Rutherford what I knew about the farmer. He was a savage brute, who had broken the heart of his wife by ill-usage, and was bidding fair to do as much for his daughter—a good, gentle, well-conducted girl; a good daughter to an ill father. I spoke warmly in her praise, for I felt very sorry for the poor thing when I thought of the beating she would be sure to get as soon as our backs were turned; but I was not prepared for the effect my words were to take. Before a month was over the Major came to me one day, and told me that he was going to be married to Farmer Byrne's daughter. Without saying a word to me, he had made inquiries about her, had seen her frequently, and partly from compassion, and partly from love, he had gone the length of proposing to her, and had been accepted.

"I was surprised, and not altogether pleased. He was so mixed up in my mind with George, that I could not separate the two, and I could not bear to have any change in our relationship. He saw I was not pleased, and took some trouble to reconcile me to it. Of course, nothing that I could say would alter the matter; so I held my tongue, and they were married very quietly at the parish church by the obnoxious rector. One good result followed this marriage; she persuaded her husband to begin to go to church again, and be friends with the rector. I was very glad of this; for their feud had been one cause that the neighbourhood held aloof from the Major, and I wanted to see him take his rightful position. His wife's influence, too, had a happy effect upon his temper and disposition. She softened his bitter contradictory spirit, and showed so much good sense in her new posi-

tion, that I ended by thinking that the Major had done the wisest act in his life when he married her.

"As to the poor girl herself, she brightened up under the influence of happiness, and looked quite a new creature. It was the first little glimpse of sunshine she had ever known. She was far too humble to fret herself because the neighbouring ladies did not receive her into their ranks, and was far too much in love with her husband to care for anything else. They lived quite privately and quietly; and, at the end of eighteen months, a little son was born, who filled up the measure of their content.

"One morning I had been to wait on the Major, to ask directions about the drainage of an outlying meadow. He agreed to ride over with me to see what was doing, and we went out together at the back of the house, to go to the stables. As we were crossing the yard we saw a wild, athletic man, half-gipsy, half-tinker, standing ready to beg or to steal, as the occasion offered. The Major had a horror of vagrants and beggars, and never showed them any mercy. All the penalties the law allows were always enforced; though no man had a kinder heart to all honest and deserving poor than he. I had seen this tinker hanging about, the day before, in the village, and had warned him off. I was surprised to see him here, for the boldest beggars never ventured near the house. The Major roughly desired him to go away. The man looked at him with impudent, malicious eyes; and, coming nearer, said something in a low tone that I did not hear. To this the Major only replied by threatening him with the riding-whip he held in his hand; the man replied insolently, and the blow descended across his face. Staggering and blinded, the man shook his fists at the Major, and said:

"I know you, George Marston; and I will do for you yet!"

"I started, as though a pistol had been discharged in my ear. I looked at the Major—our eyes met—my glance fell beneath his, and I turned away. We neither of us made any remark; we might not have heard, for any sign we gave. The Major mounted his pony, and rode alone to the field, where he remained superintending the workmen till dinner-time. I was waiting for him when he returned.

"Has any one been to ask for me?" said he, as he dismounted.

"No, sir," replied the servant.

"Stay and dine with us, Benson," said the Major, turning to me; and we went into the dining-room together. Mrs. Rutherford and the baby were there. The Major talked to his wife, played with his child, and ate his dinner like a man who enjoyed it. I sat stupefied, wondering what was to come next. After dinner, the Major proposed to drive his wife and the baby in a little forest carriage kept entirely for her use. She was delighted; and, as she took her place, I thought she looked prettier than I had ever seen her. She always had an innocent look, and a little air of rusticity that became her well. The Major's

great calmness and indifference staggered me, and did more to make me doubt my own convictions than a dozen denials.

"About an hour after the Major had gone out, two men drove to the door in a post-chaise, and inquired for him. They were strangers, but I knew they were constables. I ordered them refreshments in the Major's room; and, having seen them seated before the bread and cheese, I went out to await the Major at a turn of the road. I told him, as indifferently as I could, not to alarm his wife, and asked whether he would choose to avoid them. His cheek flushed as I spoke, and a look, like one I well remembered of old, came into his face, as he said, 'No; let them do their worst.' And then, touching the pony with the whip, he drove on as calmly as though I had asked him what was to be done with a heap of stones. The constables came out at the sound of wheels, and with official stolidity presented their warrant. The Major glanced at the paper, and shrugging his shoulders, said he was quite ready to go with them. His wife looked anxiously from one party to the other.

"'It is a summons to appear immediately before the magistrates in the next town, to give evidence in a case of disputed identity. Get my carpet-bag packed directly, there's a good little woman; I shall not be home to-night.'

"She left the room, and he made no attempt to follow her.

"'I am obliged to accompany these persons to the next town,' said the Major to me. 'They are constables, come to take me on the charge of being a returned convict. It is unpleasant, for innocent men have been hanged for their likeness to other people before now. However, I hope to establish my identity; I have a few marks to help me.'

"He spoke in a hard, dry, distinct voice, as though every word were uttered with effort. I could not speak.

"'I expect to return to-morrow,' continued he; 'but if I am detained, I will write to you. Keep Mrs. Rutherford from feeling uneasy, and use your own judgment in all things.'

"His wife entered, looking tearful and agitated. She had a presentiment of evil. His lip quivered as he bade her farewell; he grasped my hand, and sprang hastily into the post-chaise which was waiting.

"The Major did not return home the next day, nor the next after that; for he was committed to the county gaol to take his trial at the next assizes. At first the magistrates were extremely unwilling to entertain the charge, and they would have dismissed it, if, unluckily for the Major, Sir Gervaise Skinner had not been on the bench. He was a staunch old Tory, and had been terribly scandalised by the Major's liberal politics. No crime could, in his opinion, be too dreadful for such a man to commit; and this accusation seemed only the natural explanation of the Major's character. He insisted that the accused should be remanded, to give time to inquire further into the matter. The Major himself did not furnish so prompt an

exculpation as might have been expected ; he did not seem to have any friends to whose testimony he could appeal. After two remands, he was fully committed to take his trial, and I had to break the matter to his wife, who took it with a composure that surprised me. She thought her husband a persecuted man, but her faith in his innocence did not waver for an instant.

"All that followed may be read in the newspapers of the time. It remains on record as one of the most celebrated causes ever tried ; and, although it was certainly decided by judge and jury, yet public opinion was much divided, and even I have my doubts still about the matter. You shall judge for yourself.

"The old tinker, rascal as he was, told a story that, if true, was conclusive enough. He had been sentenced to seven years' transportation at the same assizes that saw George Marston sentenced for life. This part of his story was proved. He had gone out in the same convict-ship, and had seen George every day during the voyage. George was put in some sort of authority over him, and excited his ill-will. When they landed, he worked in the same gang with George. He gave minute details of George's escape, and of the savage onslaught upon the overseer, which resulted in death. A body was discovered some time after, in a state of decomposition, which was supposed to be that of George Marston, the escaped convict ; but he, the tinker, had reasons of his own for not believing it to be George Marston's body. He swore positively that the Major and George Marston were one and the same person. Two other persons, convicts who had served their time, and who had seen and conversed with George Marston before he effected his escape, were positive as to his identity with the Major. Several persons from the village where he was born, and lived before he was transported, recognised him the moment they saw him. The surgeon who had dressed the wounds received in the fatal affray with the keepers, identified him. There were wounds also on the person of the Major corresponding with those recorded in the prison entry, and in the surgeon's own private journal. Mr. Messent, the lawyer who had defended him, now a very old man, but in perfect possession of his faculties, recognised him as his old client. I was then called upon to give my evidence. I was known to have been George's friend, and a great deal was expected from me ; but I did not feel free to swear either way. I did not deny the strong resemblance ; but, living beside him so many years, I had also perceived differences which I could not reconcile ; so, after a great deal of browbeating and cross-examination, I was allowed to depart. I had at least thrown a doubt upon the case.

"The story the Major told about himself, in his defence, was ingenious and romantic. He produced a certificated extract of birth and baptism from the parish register of a small market-town in a remote part of Wales ; and called as evidence an old man and woman who had kept the only inn in the place. They declared that in such a



year, corresponding with the date of the extract, a lady and gentleman, unaccompanied by any servants, arrived at the Golden Lion. They were evidently rich, and belonged to what the old man called 'real quality.' The lady was confined of a son a few days after her arrival; and the child was baptised Andrew, and registered as the child of Thomas and Mary Rutherford. When the lady was sufficiently recovered, they departed, taking with them a Welsh nurse for the baby. The nurse returned in a few weeks, saying that the lady and gentleman were gone abroad, taking the child with them; but she showed a great reserve and unwillingness to speak of the matter. This young woman died shortly afterwards. There was great difficulty in taking the evidence of these old people, who were very deaf, and spoke only Welsh. The Major then declared that he had lived with his parents both in America and in France, until he entered the East India Company's service at the age of nineteen; but that portion of his narrative was contradictory and confused. The beginning of his career in the Indian army was also obscure. He could call no witnesses who knew anything about him until many years subsequently—until, indeed, the year after George had made his escape—and then he was not an officer, but a private soldier. That point made against him. The very next year he was in another regiment as Lieutenant Rutherford, with papers and certificates of service, with the sabre cut upon his head, the mark of which was visible enough, and also of the other wounds which actually were upon his person. From this point his case was clear; he distinguished himself in various engagements, and displayed not only courage, but high military talent. And how, asked he, was it possible that an escaped convict, a man of no education, should suddenly find himself endowed with military knowledge sufficient to fill a highly responsible position? Bravery may be innate, but military skill and knowledge must be acquired. This was well put, and evidently had great effect upon the whole court. I confess I was not much struck. I recollected George's military tastes, and had my own notions of his natural tact and cleverness, which I kept to myself. He pointed out that the persons who spoke so confidently to his identity with George Marston, the poacher, had not seen him for many years; the principal witness against him was a returned convict—a man of notoriously bad character—and who owed to having an enmity against the individual for whom he had the misfortune to be mistaken.

"The whole defence was eloquent and elaborate—too elaborate and too ingenious. The judge, in summing up, pulled it all to pieces; dwelling particularly on the fact that the accused could give no account of the most important events that had happened in his family. He knew evidently nothing of either France or America. His experiences in India were contradictory and confused, up to the year following that in which he was accused of making his escape from transportation. All this, and a great deal more that I cannot now remember,

the judge brought out. The defence was not coherent ; and the jury, without retiring, returned a verdict of guilty ; but strongly recommended the prisoner to mercy.

"The Major heard the verdict with haughty indifference ; and on being asked, in the usual form, why sentence should not be pronounced against him, replied : 'Because I am not the man who has incurred the penalty.' He uttered these words in a ringing, sonorous voice ; and this simple affirmation took more effect than all his defence put together.

"The judge passed sentence, and he was removed from the dock. The interest excited by his case was intense ; petitions and memorials on his behalf were got up all over the country, and backed by highly influential persons. What effect they might have had it is hard to say ; but they were rendered superfluous by the fact that the Major effected his own escape in a masterly fashion, unparalleled in the annals of prison-breaking. I was not surprised. I had heard him say that the prison was not built that could keep him inside if he chose to go out. He got clear off, and reached the Continent in safety. He was afterwards joined by his wife. They are both still alive. Government declined to confiscate his property : the son inherited it. I was made trustee and guardian, and have administered the affairs ever since."

When Miles finished speaking, I got up and shook hands with him—the loyal friendship of this man made me respect and admire him.

Peter said :

"Well, Miles, if ever you find the Major comes to this part of the country, I should like to see him. You are a man who deserves to have a friend, and I hope you will let me have a share in your good will."

"And I, too," said Buffy. "I am glad he escaped. You must go to see him some day—tell him I like him."

"I will, master," said Miles.

"But now," said Peter, "we must depart, or we shall be benighted."

"You will come again, Squire ?" asked Miles.

"Indeed we will," said I ; "and you must tell me more about George and his wife."

"Bless your good heart, Mrs. Mallerdean—I will do aught you ask me !"

We took our leave, and on our way home Peter and I had a conversation about the game laws, on which subject my ideas were very lax, after the manner of the female kind ; and then we had a discussion as to whether George Marston and the Major were identical. A question which Buffy decided by declaring that, if they were not the same, they were just alike !


"Who would have thought," said I, "that Miles was mixed up in such a curious romantic history !"

"My Dulce, the hearts of all men are fashioned alike, and when we can reach the heart we feel that we are all of one language and one speech. Buffy, my boy, you ought to have been in your bed an hour ago."

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## CHAPTER XXVI.

## BITTER AND SWEET.

HE result of the election did not accord me the satisfaction of permanently changing Lady Lanton's feelings towards me. On the contrary, they increased in bitterness. She had that worst species of all hatred towards me, namely, "antipathy." In the hey-day of youth and health, when the feelings are generally in extremes, whether for love or hatred, I did not wonder so much at her violence. But now that I am old, and all my sympathies and antipathies have had the training and experience of my life, I am lost in wonder at the licence she gave it. There are aversions which often arise from instinct, and which we can never fairly conquer. There are again sudden dislikes, which give way upon further knowledge, and that reasonableness which teaches us that, as God bears with all natures and all tempers, so ought we.

After much thought on the matter, I have come to the conclusion that Lady Lanton, having no sympathies or love in her heart, exercised all the feeling she possessed in hatred. Finding it impossible to please her, I gave up the attempt, and no strangers could have less to say to each other than we two. Sometimes, however, she broke out. Thus, one day, when her brother, suddenly summoned away on business, threw all his letters into my lap, and bid me answer them, she tried every art to get them from me. She pursued me into every room in the house, for no other reason than to keep me from answering them.

Knowing her powers of intense worry were great, I had to resort to stratagem. I ordered my horse, and made believe to lock up the letters, as if tired of her violence and ill-temper. But I took them with me to Lady Joyce's, and, obtaining her permission, answered them there.

That lady was judicious enough to ask me no questions, but, as I was leaving, said—

"I always consider that to be a white day in my life on which I have the pleasure of seeing Mrs. Mallerdean."

Which showed me that I might safely rely on her help as well as discretion.

About this time Peter and his sister had a slight quarrel. She wished to ask Countess Harmann to visit us. Her husband was lately dead, and she was in sorrow.

"Not for the world," said Peter, kindling with anger.

Of course she said that his manner and refusal were both caused by my influence. I recommended her to go and visit her friend, as she was not allowed to have her at Mallerdean.

"That was truly grateful of me, considering how she had welcomed my friends; and though she had but one in the world, I took care to have her excluded."

Thus did she poison our daily life, and I felt inclined to murmur. Forgetful of all the blessings I enjoyed—my husband, my child, my home, the increasing love and respect of all around me—I set up Lady Lanton as a "Mordecai in the gate." In good time was I stayed, though it was a bitter pill that cured me of murmuring. It happened thus: Peter was one day about to throw his letters into my lap, when he paused, and held one in his hand. After a few muttered words to himself, he gave me that also, saying,

"Yes, I can trust you, Dulce; answer it as well as the rest."

Lady Lanton was not present, so I hastened and locked myself up in my own room.

I was proud of answering Peter's letters, and in one or two instances had been praised for the business-like manner in which I had replied.

I was under a compact never again to mention "the pretty toy," but I own I thought very often of how she was now a useful one.

I put the letter aside which Peter had regarded so earnestly. I thought it was something out of the common, so I would finish the others before I fixed my mind wholly upon it.

I remember well all those letters that morning.

One was a parliamentary summons.

I answered, he would obey it.

One was an offer of seven and sixpence a foot for an avenue of walnut-trees. I knew Peter had already refused half a guinea for the same, so I said they were not to be sold at any price.

One was a petition from a voter to be made a tidal waiter.

The answer—"Mr. Mallerdean would do his best."

A fourth was thanks for a haunch of venison.

A fifth was a rigmarole of a political nature, which required no answer.

The sixth was the one put aside, and was as follows:—

"MY GOOD FRIEND,—Why will you not let me come to Mallerdean? I must make some arrangements with you about your child. In the settlement of my affairs, under the will of Alphonse, I find my income will be preposterously small. That is the worst of marrying a foreigner. They fancy three hundred a year absolute wealth. Though I own you have liberally and always complied with any little demand, I should now like to have a settled sum paid quarterly. Say my income is

made up by you to a thousand a year ! It is no object to me now to keep our joint interest in the boy a secret, Alphonse being dead—but it is so to you. If you had permitted me to tell you this, instead of writing it, perhaps I should have been more reasonable. I believe the brat ought to go to school—I hate the sight of him. Emma says your wife is jealous, and that is why I am tabooed Mallerdean Court. I have a mind to send the boy to her, as a little surprise. They say she is fond of children, which you know I am not. Be reasonable.

“Yours,

“JULIA.”

Peter had a son ! and it was not mine !

One of the most beautiful spots near Mallerdean was a wild sort of glen or valley, named Ravenshawe. Walks were cut through it after a rough fashion, which extended for miles and miles. In every other respect, nature was left entirely to herself—and revelled accordingly.

She festooned, in one place, an aged, time-honoured, stag-headed oak with long wreaths of ivy, coloured from darkest shade to the lightest loveliest spring green—she studded its vast roots with bosses of primroses and soft feathery tufts of fern, that seemed to flourish and grow beautiful from the very decay of its hoary age.

Then enclosing one in a thick dense covert of dark wood, where the voice returned back to one as if sounded in a canopied hall, and the bees and insects hummed solemnly, and an odour of forest things, blossoming and decaying, filled the air, she suddenly opened a sunlit glade, where all things living and dead revelled in light and joyousness.

A carpet of blue hyacinths covered the ground—tender young trees, self-sown, expanded their soft green leaves to the wind and sun— islands of huge fan-leaves seemed to erect their great stems into a tent-like form, to make houses for the nimble rabbits that popped in and out from beneath them, like spirits, with little ghostly tails.

Ever was heard the murmur of the river, keeping a sort of time and rhythm with the music of the woods.

Often we came upon it, now running merrily over the stones, so shallow that, but for the ripple, one would imagine the river a rough pathway ; now deepening into a pool that reflected every leaf and bough—every flower and blade of grass—and far away, above everything, the little fleecy, feathery, vapoury, sailing cloud.

Sometimes nature changed the whole scene, and brought to view a bold cliff, standing red, bare, and almost naked. A stunted tree or two, sapplings hanging between earth and air, a fir-tree all awry, an independent, upright, luxuriant plume of tall ferns, just touched it with magic tokens of life. But as if to make amends, as if to show that bare as nature made the spot, she yet enriched it pricelessly, a delicious scent permeated the air.

On the sunniest, stoniest spot, shouldering each other like fright-

ened sheep, scarce one standing out from the phalanx, we discovered a bed of lilies of the valley. Amid the thick dew-spangled leaves, what treasures we found! But soft, let us be careful how we tread. Bare and stony as was this great cliff, within its bosom it concealed a spring. This gently oozing forth, covered the ground with brightest moss, among which rose, like little stately maidens, pinquicolas, with their thin stems rising out of a tiny mat of yellow green leaves, spreading like star-fish. Further on, the spring no longer concealed itself in the green treacherous moss, but bubbled out from beneath some lichened stones, a merry little brook, and sped a short but sportive life down to the river.

Oh! the wonders and the beauty, and the riches of Ravenshawe! No wonder that I fled there, in this, a sudden, grievous blow, to hide, to pray, to fight with human weakness!

On my return I answered the letter.

"MADAM,—Mr. Mallerdean having entrusted me with the answer to your letter, I fancy the most proper plan would be to relieve you of the charge of the child, and have him sent to school. As you do not fear publicity, I shall hope that Mr. Mallerdean will not visit upon the innocent his own sin, but endeavour for the future to do a father's part by him, so that the misfortune of his birth may be the only one he will experience.

"I remain, Madam,

"Your obedient servant,

"DULCE MALLERDEAN."

Before I left my room, I placed the letter, and a copy of the answer, into a sealed cover, and put them where Peter could see them when he came home.

Mixed with all the torments of jealousy was that horror and shrinking from sin which the first real "face to face" with it must bring. In my distraction I had pulled down the wreaths of ivy from the old oak tree, I had rooted out the primroses, I had trod down the little delicate tufts of ferns. To and fro I had stamped over the bed of lilies; cruelly I had thrust the little pinquicolas down deep into the moss. And in this spirit Peter found me.

"Oh! Dulce!"

At the sound of his voice, so tender, so self-upbraiding, I rushed into his arms, and, hiding my crimsoned face on his bosom, I burst into an agony of tears.

"My Dulce!" said Peter to me, after a time, "had I known that the letter was of so bad, so heartless a nature, I would not for worlds have let you read it. But, as I have often told you, I desire to have no secrets from my wife. When I gave you my letters to answer, I did

not at first perceive this one, but it was a point of honour with me not to retain it, after asking you to answer them all. Upon my word, I thought it would contain no more than the oft-repeated request for money. The death of her husband has removed, from a very reprobate mind, the last tie of restraint and self-respect. Stung, perhaps, by the refusal to see her, she meant to hurt me in other ways. I can only thus account for so wicked a letter."

I longed to know what Peter thought of my answer, but, as yet, I dared not lift my eyes to his face.

"It is a sad thing, but still most true, that we make for ourselves our bitterest sorrows. It is, I suppose, rare for youth to pass without the committal of some sin, the exposure of some weakness, which causes an alloy to be mixed with everything, even the sweetest moments of our lives. Thus, when I first saw you, the innocent, modest expression of your countenance surpassed its beauty. I felt instantly, 'Here is a woman I could worship!' With this feeling came one of the bitterest remorse. 'Would anything so pure love me?' It was not in my nature to marry, unless she knew all. It was beyond all possibility that I should cause those sweet eyes to droop in confusion, that modest cheek to blush from words of mine. So then, torn one way, urged another, I have gone on to this day, and suffered chance to tell you that a being lives who, I am told, has a right to call me father."

"You are told, Peter?"

"Yes, my wife, my reason bids me doubt the fact; while my honour, as a man, makes me act as if 'twas true."

"I will doubt as you do—happy that I may doubt. So happy, that, Peter, he, the boy, your supposed son, shall have you for his father."

"Ah! Dulce, what a fine heart you have! Let me show you all her letters."

"Oh! no, Peter!"

"Why not, dearest one?"

"Because—because I do not wish to see them. Because, Peter, without knowing it, you may have said something to her you have not said to me."

"Dearest, I have not. From the moment when, in an hour of evil temptation, she forfeited her place in my esteem, and I first felt what a hideous thing is sin, our intercourse has been bound by the coldest decorum. Even before, in the hottest flood of boy-passion, I never loved her as I do you. I worship the light all the more for the darkness into which I seemed suddenly plunged. I can say no more to you, love; you know nothing of sin and wickedness!"

"Oh! but I do. I know a great deal. Once Marblette and I witnessed a sad thing; and we were in a court of justice, and examined; and, Peter, it was a case of life and death."

"Tell it me, then," he asked.

And, putting me gently down, he sat beside me, and, eager to tell him, I looked up, forgetting.

Oh! Peter! Peter! what a face you had! So sorrowful, so gentle, so beseeching! I was about to hide my face again.

"Look at me, my darling; say you forgive me for the pain I have caused you; say that you love me; say something kind to me, for, indeed, indeed, I am desolate without it!"

"I love you!—I love you! Look into my eyes, and they will speak what there are no words to tell. It is against my nature to think a thought of evil in one of my own sex, otherwise, Peter, I might conclude she in some manner compassed her own fate.

Great tears came up into his eyes, as well as a happy light. He was too right-minded to excuse himself at the expense of another, but I saw that he was comforted by my surmise.

"One thing, Peter, the innocent must not suffer."

"How can it be otherwise, Dulce? The stigma of birth can never be removed."

"But if acknowledged by you?"

"I think it will increase the difficulties of his position. My sister knows nothing; will you have her scorn her friend for her brother's fault?"

"True! let us think calmly over it. I will tell you my story about poor Bell."

After I had finished, I said:

"Two things have, ever since that event, impressed themselves on my mind. One rather bears upon the point in question. You know servants will talk before children. At the same time, Marblette and I noticed a gentleness, a forbearance, and a mysterious hushing up of the whole matter concerning poor Bell, that is, among the elder servants; but one, a very young girl, was flippant, and began to talk of that openly which none had dared to speak of. Nurse Alexander turned suddenly round, and, in her harshest voice, rebuked her thus:

"'Whist! the Lorrd hath hidden poor Bell and herr sin in the grrove. If thou meddlest with his secrets, thou shalt meet wi' a fit recompence. When a woman tells of ane ither woman, I reckon there aint mooch to choose atween 'em?"

"At that age, you know, Peter, we knew nothing of the nature of Bell's crime, but the womanly regard for the good name of one's own sex found the ready echo of Nurse Alexander's words in our little hearts. And now that I am so much older, I see more and more the truth and beauty of them. You must let me, spite of all things, think the best I can of her."

"It is for that, Dulce, I tell you no more. What is the other thing that remains on your mind?"

"It has to do with that sailor who endeavoured to subvert our testimony and substitute his own. From what possible motive could he do a thing of that sort, a life endangered by it?"



"I know not, Dulce, excepting that there are natures in this world of so stupid and loutish a sort, that, for the sake of a little notoriety, they will endanger even their own lives. He probably felt a desire to be brought into notice; he could only do it by a flat contradiction of all two little children said. His obtuseness of mind prevented him from thinking of the consequences. Do you know what became of him?"

"No, but I remember people said he was remanded for perjury. Oh! Peter, human nature is very wicked!"

"My Dulce, human nature is not to blame so much as habits and education. I have been as often pleased, not to say surprised, with traits of goodness and worth where least I thought they dwelt."

"Then, Peter, this boy, this child; is he to be left to her?"

"No, he shall not. Give me leave to go and see her."

"Why ask my leave?"

"Because—" then he stopped. "Oh! wife, forgive me! I will go to-morrow. If I can so arrange it that, without detriment to him, further exposure is avoided, I shall do so. Now, will you tell me if there is anything I can do so as to render this day not wholly a miserable one?"

I knew he meant what he said. It was, no doubt, to me, a most dreadful day, and I desired, with him, to do my best to gladden it with some sunshine. But I was silent, for I knew not what to say.

"Why did you come here to-day?" he asked.

"Because, Peter, I felt I should be alone, and I was not fit for other company."

"That is a thing I admire in you so much, Dulce, your love of nature. You perceive beauty in a leaf, happiness in the gambols of the wind, delight up to the very vault of heaven. You know all nature's treasures by sight; you call them by their names, as if they were your sisters; you are as familiar with their habits as if you lived with them in her bosom. I have seen people look at that scene which fills you with delight, and notice nothing. I observe that you forget no scene where you have experienced a joy; that you remember all things connected with a refined sense of pleasure. In nature's world there are great gifts for you, which others pass by as insignificant. I love the consciousness of having done good—of being worthy of worthy praise—of deserving and obtaining a good name. But in none of these things do I find that unalloyed delight which thrills through your frame from the mere breathing, inhaling, the sweet morning air."

"I was always impulsive, and pleased with little things."

"The love of God's gifts is not a little thing," said he; "it is a pure impulse, and pure impulses have extraordinary power. All my life I have lived with people who only think of people. We regard the word, and all that is in it, as made for us to use and abuse, but not to

praise or admire. It is a servant, a slave, to furnish us with what we require, and to expect nothing in return. But the people who live in it, with us, these are objects of our curious regard. We observe their character, we question their motives, we pass judgment on their actions, and love or dislike them accordingly. This leads to the many sins of gossip, of satire, of injustice. If we give very high praise, some one smudges it over with an ugly story; if we blame, we are rebuked with a history that makes us blush we cannot do the like. It is for this that I have always endeavoured to talk of books rather than persons—of past events, and not the present. But you have opened to my mental vision a volume of Nature that promises a never-ceasing, exquisite, and pure pleasure.”

“To hear you speak thus, Peter, will give me one pleasing remembrance of this day.”

“I must do more. Walk with me to Arcadia.”

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## CHAPTER XXVII.

### DULCE DOMUM.



ARCADIA was a small but lovely sort of house-cottage, built after a fanciful fashion by Peter's grandmother.

It was situated at that end of Ravenshawe nearest to Mallerdean House. The banks of the river were extremely steep, and she had formed from the house to its brink a series of terraces, of which each was a separate garden. The one nearest the house was close-shaven and trimly kept, radiant at all seasons with bright garden flowers. The second was a fernery; the third contained wild flowers only, tended and cared for as pets are considered. The fourth had a low wall fencing it from the river. Luxuriant creepers, large aged bushes of lavender, tender little shoots of wallflowers had possession of the wall. And as one sat upon its low parapet and leaned over, the lavender perfumed one's dress, and the honeysuckle filled the air with fragrance.

When I said the house was fanciful, it was because it was never meant to be lived in, but to be used as a pleasure-house. There was a large banquetting-room, lavishly painted and gilded, old-fashioned couches, settees, and chairs were placed round it, and many tables, of all sizes and shapes, were now standing against the walls. The floor was inlaid and polished. Little Persian carpets were folded up in the corners, ready to be put down. This banquetting-room opened into a long rosary, made of trellis-work—at the end was a fountain.

What was styled a parlour was also on the ground floor, with some fresco paintings to decorate the walls. Upstairs were three bed-rooms—unfurnished—large, airy rooms. Across a little court was a kitchen,

over which were two bed-rooms. In this part lived an old man and his wife, who took care of everything. The principal feature of the place was a dairy, built like a pavilion ; the interior was large, lofty, and cool. A stream of purest water ran through the centre, dividing it into two portions. The walls were glazed with fine Dutch tiles, and large beautiful bowls were ranged along the shelves. Great pans of brass, curiously patterned with figures, letters, and arabesques, were ranged round the floor.

"This place," said Peter, "was my grandmother's hobby ; it is recorded that my grandfather gave it to her on their reconciliation after a quarrel. Tradition says that the quarrel arose from no greater a matter than that he entered her boudoir without going through the proper ceremony of knocking for leave, or scratching, as was then the fashion, at the door. Here she amused herself for days and weeks, ornamenting it, and laying out the grounds. Here she entertained her intimate friends with the great luxury of tea. Her dairy was her passion, and the fame of it extended all over the country. Let me emulate my grandfather, and give my wife this toy-house, wherein she may follow the bent of any fancy she chooses."

"But we have not quarrelled, Peter."

"We almost disputed which of us should most honour the female sex."

"I leave that duty in your hands. I think it is safe enough. But I accept your gift."

"Thanks, love ; with your taste, I feel certain it will become a bower of loveliness and happiness. But I must christen it anew—*Dulce Domum*."

"I think, Peter," said I, all flushing with ardour, "that I will have a dairy, too, and give tea and music parties ; and I will re-arrange it, and we will fit up the bedchambers. Sometimes you and I will come here, and you shall have no other servant than me. Solitude and quiet are good for the brains as well as the souls of men. There are many things we can talk of and discuss here, Peter, that we scarcely have the opportunity to do at home."

"As you are to have a dairy, I must add to *Dulce Domum* a field or two. Also I must give you a right to cut wood for the use of your house."

"Then it is to be mine absolutely !"

"Absolutely. You are to do what you like with it, let it, and keep the rent ; live in it, with the only condition that I live with you ; pull it down, erase it, alter it—in short, it is so much yours, that I will have a deed drawn up, signed and sealed, making it irrevocably over to you."

I had almost forgotten the misery of the morning in the child-like pleasure of having a house, a real house of my own, to do what I liked with.

I longed to have my sisters that I might show to them how fate

had compensated me for the unenviable possession of Earwig Cottage.

During Peter's absence for the next two days on that dreadful business, I drove all thoughts of it out of my mind by working hard at Dulce Domum.

Peter scarcely knew the real value of his gift to me. Here I could say and do as I liked, receive whom I pleased, be real mistress of it all; while at my great house at Mallerdean I was nowhere free from Lady Lanton.

One curious arrangement in Dulce Domum was that all the doors were only sliding panels. They were made thus, as I was told, for the convenience of the large parties of powdered and hooped ladies who congregated to old Mrs. Mallerdean's tea-parties, filling her little house to overflowing. She was a great woman for fresh air and healthy habits. The shutting of a door made her faint. So she resorted to the convenient expedient of apparently having no doors at all. Also, the house was hermetically sealed from foes and robbers when the panels were closed, which was desirable, as there was much valuable property in the house, with but slight watch over it.

Everything on the Mallerdean estate was always kept in perfect order and repair. Thus I had not much to do with my new house but to modernise it.

Buffy and I worked hard to perfect it.

"Mother Hubbard," said he, "this is the house for you and your boy. Let me have my room in it."

"Agreed," I answered; "which will you have?"

"I don't want your saloon," said he, gravely; "and I am not anxious for a parlour. The bed-rooms will all be used by you, Uncle Peter, and little Peter. I want this place for mine."

And, springing on a chair, he poked his head up through a hole in the ceiling and shouted with delight.

Astonished at the boy, I, too, sprung on the chair, and poked my head through. Then we saw a fine large attic. Properly speaking it was a garret, but, being ceiled, and lighted with a window at each end, it was airy and pleasant.

"Give me your hand, Mother Hubbard, and we will climb up into it."

"No, we will have a staircase made at once. You do not wish always to jump on a chair and scramble through a hole to get to your room."

This being reasonable, we had the carpenters up, and, with a little ingenuity, soon contrived a convenient staircase, which would be ready for use in a week. That would not suit Buffy's impatience; he went up by the chair through the hole, and, finding him anxious to conceal the arrangements he was making in his attic, I took care to busy myself elsewhere.

On the third day Peter came home. He desired me to meet him in

the cottage. We met in the rosary, and I saw at once he looked happy and contented. We went down and seated ourselves on the parapet of the wall, and then he told me how he had sped.

It was, as he had imagined, no part of her intention to lose her good name. Her aim being to marry again, for position no less than wealth, she thought it would be to her advantage to have plenty of money, and all the appearance of a splendid jointure. Hence the reason of her unwomanly letter.

He was about to tell me what arrangement he had made with her, but I somehow did not wish to know. I hoped that "he," the boy, was not to be left wholly to her.

"No, I have taken him away, and placed him with a man who was one of the masters of the first school I went to myself. I told him nothing about the child further than that he was my ward. I am certain he will be well educated, and I know he will be kindly treated."

I longed to ask a question, but in the broad daylight I could not do it.

Peter drew from his pocket a parchment. It was his deed of gift to me of the cottage and fourteen acres of land surrounding it, with various rights besides.

Still we recurred now and then to "her."

"She was furious with me for my mad trust in you, Dulce; saying, 'She has you now in her power. Do you think she is so little of a woman, so much of an angel, as not to use it?' I answered, 'I think so.' At which she laughed contemptuously. Still, finding me unmoved, she raked up old sayings of mine, as these:

"'I can remember a certain Peter Mallerdean holding so high, so noble a sense of woman's fame, that he professed death itself would be welcome if he traduced it.'

"'I still hold that opinion.'

"'And yet you have told your wife?—of all people in the world, the last who ought to have heard it.'

"'In telling her of my faults, I said nothing of yours.'

"'Then she knows no particulars?'

"'Nothing—partly because I could not bear to see on her pure cheek blushes of shame, though it were for others, and partly because she would not hear them.'

"'Oh! as if I could believe that.'

"'Perhaps not; but, Julia, I can thank God 'tis true.'

(Why did he call her by her Christian name? I did not like that. Ever since that name has been ugly to me.)

"Then she spoke of my sister, Dulce; she made an assertion I cannot believe; yet an inward pang makes me feel 'tis true. She says my sister hates you."

"She does not love me."

"But—but—surely, Dulce, I must be mad to believe it—she has struck you!"

"It seems to me, Peter, that the Countess Harmann wishes to make mischief amongst us all. The chief and best way to disappoint her is to regard nothing that she says. Should she succeed in making a breach among us, be sure she will step in."

"Dulce, look straight at me. I do not wish a word, but merely a sign, and my sister shall go to her own, indeed her proper home."

"So far from making any sign, all my words shall be the other way. If ever your sister leaves us, let it be at her own wish."

"But I must be more explicit with you. Just before my marriage, I made my will; and knowing your ignorance of everything but love and artless ways, I appointed, in case of my death, Lady Lanton as guardian and trustee of all things at Mallerdean, wife and children included."

"Oh, Peter, I shall not like that at all! Please make another will."

"My reason for doing this arose from the fact that my sister's whole nature is as it were wrapped up in me and mine. Her love for Mallerdean has grown with her growth, strengthened with her strength. To indulge this love, she has refused a home of her own, sacrificed all the pleasure of ruling in her proper place, and devoted herself to me."

It was not for me to say that she would never have done all this unless it had pleased her.

As I remained silent, Peter, scrutinising my face, said,

"You do not agree with me."

"She has not been tried, yet, Peter. I notice that some people will have their own way, and think they must be miserable without it. Yet when accident or any other cause brings before them, or proves to them, what they rejected has perhaps been that thing they would have liked best, then the reaction is as great the other way."

"I do not intend to argue more about my sister, for I perceive my wife intends that if we part my sister and myself are alone responsible for it. This is not the first instance wherein I have seen a wisdom in my Dulce's conduct that has surprised as well as delighted me. Therefore, to return to my will, I shall make another, and you shall be consulted about it. When I said guardian, I meant the hope she would be guardian, not absolutely having made her so; for I could not make that woman my wife who was not fitted to be the guardian of her own children."

"Ah, that is well, that is right! Oh, Peter, what a frightful pang it gave me to think I was not thought wise enough to take care of my little Peter! I thought I disliked you for a minute."

"Did you?—then, to make amends, you must love me more dearly than ever. No, my sister, under my present will, has absolute control over everything at Mallerdean, as trustee; and I beg her, as she loves me, to guard and watch over those I love better than myself. But my children will never have any other guardian than their mother."

"Then I am satisfied."

"What! I am not to make another will?"

"Oh yes, and make another trustee."

"You?"

"No, Peter, I hope God will be so good to me, that, in the hour you leave me, I may be already gone before. Oh, don't speak of it!—I think, I hope, nay, I must die myself in that hour."

"God love you, my darling, and keep all harm and sorrow from you! As old Dobbs said, I am in love with life, and hope my earthly paradise will long be my portion. I feel sure that each year I experience the delight and power of love, each year shall I feel more grateful to the Giver of all good, more desirous to live according to His commands."

Such remarks were not usual in our day, especially from young men. They caused a sort of solemnity to fill our minds.

When we arose from the parapeted wall, it seemed as if we had been engaged in some holy service; the Countess, Lady Lanton, the miseries, sins, evils of life were all forgotten, in a sudden glow of spirit, bringing before our mental vision the invisible world. That night, in its darkest hour, I whispered to Peter, "Is he, the child, like you?"

"Not in the least," he replied, loudly and joyfully.

I was glad.

Every day Peter made some present to Dulce Domum. One day it was two cows. The giving of names to these our first living possessions, cost Buffy and me a whole day's thought. In compliment to the great-grandmother to whom we owed the cottage, we called one Arcadia, and the other Erminia, her own name.

This reminds me that just at this time, searching in an old cabinet, I discovered some papers, with one of which we were delighted. It was apparently the character of the old lady, written in fair and beautiful characters by herself, and was as follows, and entitled thus :—

*"Character of me, Erminia Mallerdean, written by myself, being now within two months, all but a week, of completing my eighty-fourth year.*

"I desire to thank my God that I am, though of so great an age, free from pain, or from any mortal disease but that which Time lays silently on us all. My sight is a little dim, but my hearing passably good. I eat because it pleaseth me, and not of necessity, forcing my appetite to be mindful of my strength, having taste yet for that which is good and dainty. With a kind arm, or my stout Malacca cane, given me by my good friend and dearest son, Mr. Mallerdean, I can take a fair share of exercise, visiting this my delightful pleasure-house, rightly styled Arcadia. I think that, next to God's favour, who

gave me a happy home, a peaceful and quiet temperament, I owe my present health and strength to a love of the fresh air, to a great use of cold water baths, and a temperance in all manner of pleasures. I lean back in my bee-hive chair, which my grandchild and namesake so prettily cushioned for mine ease, and think of the past. The voices of children, playing on the floor, whom I have been watching with my dim old eyes, take me back to the children of eighty years ago.

"Among them, I see mine own self—as a child, somewhat wilful, passionate, of a generous, tender heart, but perverse—nay, I was somewhat stubborn, and mine humour oftentimes unpersuadable, which led me into doleful mishaps. I remember me of the slaps, pinches, and scolds which but hardened me the more ; still better, the soft mother words of tender reproof that made mine eye-springs gush out with the tears of repentance.

"I am startled from this inward looking back by a cry from the floor. I open mine eyes, and stedfastly regard the children playing there. Mayhap there is one who is the copy of the child who played so eighty years ago. She is there ; dark, with dark eyes, and thick black curls, all wayward and tossed. Those eyes I have seen with a soft and tender look, but now they are sparkling with a rage. She hath flown at her elder sister, the flame of anger in her cheeks ; but even in her quick wrath she hath lifted up a little weeping child of two, suddenly fallen ; she doth kiss it tenderly, and place it gently out of danger. Then she confronts her sister, who speaks soft words of beseeching and argument. But she will have no argument—her own will or nothing. More and more she groweth like this child of eighty years ago. I am minded to stay her, but what hath the old grandam left of the quick blood and hot ferment of youth ?

"It must seethe itself out. The more generous vintage hath ever the greater lees. Let the passions of her nature work themselves out in the child. Compunction will lend its ready aid to pave the road she must ever travel of forbearance and self-denial. But for thy sake, dark-haired and dark-eyed child, for the warning to thy quick temper, thine old grandam will bethink her of the gifts God gave her, and if—ay ! if, she hath used them well. I will begin with the better part of me :—

"*My Soul.*—I remember me now of the hour wherein I realised the 'something of my soul.' I lay in mine little cot. Upon my cheek were the stains of passionate tears ; in my heart were the sobs of an angry temper. A stormy day of petulance and punishment, individually mine own, was followed by a night of equinoctial fury in the elements that all shared in far and near. The tempest of my soul had so wearied me, that with tears still trickling, and sobs heaving the bed-clothes, I sank into that best gift, the healing balm of sleep.

"Suddenly I was awakened by the rude clamour of the wind and hail beating and battling against the casement window of my chamber. The burden of the stormy day of passion hanging heavily on my eye



lids, and retaining its influence on my mind, so mixed itself up with the war of the elements, that all seemed as one thing.

"What could be that mysterious 'something' that moved and stirred me, against my will, to be as wild and violent as these blustering night winds?

"That 'something,' which intuitively I felt must live for 'ever and ever,' even when my body, young or old, should be decayed and buried; a 'something' that never could be destroyed, but would go on, times upon times, centuries on centuries, until I was giddy with the thought thereof.

"'Ever and ever.' I covered my head with the bed-clothes, as if by so doing I could shut out the thought thereof, for it was so awful. It brought a terror with it that made me cry out a smothered scream. If I could but cease to be, and, in ceasing to be, rid me of the passion and sin that tormented me with throes of shame and penitence! And the wind rushing howling along seemed to shriek 'Never!' and the hail pattered against the window with a 'Never! never!' in the sound; while a sudden rolling thunder-peal boomed out, 'Never! never! never!'

"Then came upon me the inevitableness of eternity; the consciousness of a soul that was to live through it; the power of evil, the weakness of will. Down into the very depths of my heart fell that despondency that might come upon one lost in a desert. Who could help me, and raise me out of this maze, this illimitable space, where my soul lay trembling and frightened? The bed shook beneath me, moved by my tremor, and the roar of the tempest smote the house to its very foundations. Suddenly I bethought me of my father's words: 'We must pray this night for the sailors, that God will have their souls in safe keeping.' God loved all souls, he would keep mine as well as the sailors'. Gathering myself up in the bed, I lay prostrate on my knees under the bedclothes, and prayed. Prayed as a little loving child might pray to its loving father.

"'Take care of me, Father in heaven, for I am thy little child. I am weak and feeble, and I forget that I have a soul, which is to be kept good, to live with Thee. Make me think more of my soul than my body; for one is to perish, but the other is given me that I may, with Thy help, become an angel and live in heaven. Pity your little child, Father, and have pity upon the sailors out on the stormy seas.'

"In some such truthful love did I pray, and through all the storms and trials of eighty years have I had the same child-like faith and trust in my Father in heaven. And the wind never blows, or the thunder roars, but I remember me of this night when I first felt the 'something' of my soul, and prayed that God would take it into His safe keeping, as well as the souls of the sailors perilled on these stormy nights.

"Outwardly I made not much show of these thoughts stirring within me. But in my heart they rose with every other feeling, and in mine imagination I did think my Father in Heaven did shadow me

in the palm of His hand. I felt Him near, and, with awe, would speak with Him at times.

"If, as is the sad failing of our birthright, I did let time slip by, and forget my never-dying soul, then would a storm come in good time to remind me of its peril, and the peril of the poor sailors.

"Not that I was after a fashion good. My temper remained ever hasty, though my spirit prompted a quick repentance. Further, I was given to many flights of imagination, and they were of that sort which troubled me most at solemn and ill-convenient times.

"We led not idle lives in those days ; so, like Martha, I was apt, in my zeal, to be forward with my woman's work, to cumber me with many cares, so that my better duties were haply lessened, or, worse, forgotten. The vanities and delights of fine clothes and goodly raiment held me in some thrall. I seemed to have a mind, at times, to rival 'the lilies of the fields.' Vain effort, the which I acknowledged, while I strove the more.

"The love of praise (which I think no sin) was necessary to me. But sometimes, with the fear of censure, the dread of mockery, the hope of worldly grandeur, the desire to be loved, I put all these things before the love of God. They ruled me, each in its hour. But as each faded, either satiating or mischancing, then did I turn me, assured, reliant.

"Oh ! Father, whom have I in heaven but Thee ?"

"When the sense of these sins, the violence of others, the power and never-ending, vigorous returns of temptation assailed me, shook me, overcame me, then I said :

"Oh ! Father, pity me, aid me !"

"Tempest-tossed in soul, and tempest-tossed the sailors, I prayed :

"Oh ! be merciful to all."

"When full of life's blessing, bountifully supplied with love, with goodly raiment, purple and fine linen, with no lack, feastings and plenteous provision, the luxuries of pomp, of all that the world loves and delights in, then I said :

"Oh ! Father, I love Thee—Thee, the giver of it all."

"And thus hath it been my custom, since that night when I realized my soul, eighty years ago. But a little longer, and I shall see 'my Father !' But a little longer, and I think to hear Him say :

"She is weak, she is foolish, she hath often erred, she hath not toiled as she might. She hath done what she ought not to have done, and neglected what she might have done. But she is 'my child ;' she calleth me 'Father !' for I gave her a soul. Through all things she hath loved me. Seal her with My Seal !"

"Then shall my soul thrill no more with the fear of that 'ever and ever.' But, out of the fulness of its ecstasy, wonder if eternity will suffice for praise and glory.

"*My Mind.*—It hath pleased God to give me that mind which ever liketh great and noble things. I love to hear of good deeds, and warm

towards those who do them, even if I know them not, and am not ever likely to know them. If I have an enemy, I love to do him service, even to mine own hindrance. I know not that thing called malice. It doth seem to me as only belonging to devils, unbecoming the creatures gifted by God with an ever-living soul.

"I do not care to remember an ill-service, but that I may requite it with good. I bethink me not who or what is he or she that desireth a favour at mine hand. I think only how best I may do it. Yet this mind, that contenteth me so far it will not disgrace my soul with aught that is pitiful and vile, rests imperfect.

"It hath a desire to be held of higher nature than belongeth to human nature. It resents a question of its fitness for any work, even angels' work. It would always and ever be credited with the best intention, however that intention may miscarry. It hath the power to conceive of the best, but lacketh the skill to do it, and yet it desireth the praise as if it had done it. In a word, it would be thought better than it is.

"*My Character*—By no means pleaseth me. 'Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel.' Such was Reuben's curse, such hath been mine. I lack the power to say yea or nay at the fitting moment, and the last speaker hath mostly that which he or she wills of me. But this must needs be on matters for which I care little. Let me have heart in it, and I may not rest until I do it, right or wrong.

"There is no judgment in all this. I am guided by impulse. Of all characters, that is least beneficial which is swayed to and fro. In consistency there lyeth great virtue. Yet doth it often happen that the vacillator will take up an obstinacy of so sorry a kind as to do good to none, and much harm to himself. From this perversity I am by no means free, and indeed have been minded to hate myself for the dolour and straights into which it hath fetched me.

"For full half a century was I the sport of this contrariness—but by true pains and the blessing of God I did mend myself in such sort as was a gain to me.

"But for the rest, I am of a simple and ingenuous nature, taking for truth all that is told me, and seeking for nothing deeper than that which mine eye and mine ear tell to my heart.

"I am not so just as generous, permitting feeling to overmaster sense.

"I am romantic, and in my friendships think nothing too hard for me to do to express my affection.

"It never seemed to me that any action I had ever heard or read of, in regard to giving or bestowing benefits, was of an extraordinary or uncommon nature. Those that had the power of being generous, forgiving, charitable, noble, were those dignified by God with a high and envied privilege; and if I know what envy is, then do I feel it, when I see these fortunate ones exercising their gift after the fashion of their Omnipotent Master and Exemplar.

"There is an indolence in my character that I like not—it hurteth me most through.

*My Affections.*—I wot me, they rise and fall, in proportion as I see those who excite them. I forget not those I have loved, but if I see them not, mine indolence lets the matter rest. I seek them not, but rest content to have seen and known them, pandering to mine indolence by the thought that if I see them not in this world more, we shall, through God's mercy, meet in the other, never to part. In a word, I take what affection is offered me, but in the matter of keeping it up, I help but little; and should it die, I fear me I am soon consoled. But in regard of that love which rises once like the breath of life, inflating the lungs of the newly-born, making it live—and which, withdrawn, causes it to die—that love, namely, of the young bride, which enters her heart as she seals with her lips her troth—that love still springs in mine fresh as ever, even though a fair lifetime hath elapsed since mine eye hath seen, mine ear heard, or mine hand touched him who was my bridegroom. As doth happen in simple natures, I gave him, with my first kiss, all the love in my eighteen years old heart. Perhaps I endowed him too much—perhaps I made an idol of him who was only to be my husband—perhaps it was for the betterment of both, but gently, with infinite warnings, with tender preparation, God desired that while my children were yet lisping the pretty words of childhood, they should have two fathers in heaven, and only their mother on earth. Fifty years and more have come and gone since then, but my old heart thrills, my dim eyes glisten, and a smile comes to my aged lips, as I think—

"Soon now and I shall see him once again !

*My Gifts.*—God hath entrusted me with various good gifts, that have been both a delight and a consequence to me. And would have been more so, had I fairly used them.

"The one was a vivid imagination, that did romance all things, howsoever sombre and distasteful. By the which I did see no trouble where others had a mountain in their way; and I was over the worst while they were yet seeking how to do it. But I suffered mine imagination ofttimes to present her face daubed with mine own colouring, rather than regard the pure, fair face of Truth. So that in the everyday business of life I have encountered troubles of a perplexing kind, and many times have had painfully to remember that, though the world pleases itself by fiction, it will do its work by facts.

"Mine aptitude for business was not great, and I had the mortification of many mischances. I had my woman's privilege of 'quick wits,' and may bless God that my nature inclined me not to evil things, for I jumped at many a conclusion. Of deep reasoning and sound argument I was no judge. I said 'yea' with an impulse, and 'nay' with a doubt.

*My Talents.*—I had a good ear for an air of music, and a tunable voice to sing it. I had a fairish notion of painting the sweet flowers of nature. At woman's work I was apt, and went among my neighbours

as one skilled therein, and at times the heartache hath been fairly routed by the workings of my needle. For the which I thank God, as it was a simple remedy, and brought me no shame.

"For all the fine plenishments of education, if I was not in the first ranks, yet was I many rows from the last, and it was mine own fault I was no better. What I gained by mine eye and ear I liked better than what I learned or wrote. A memory of no great power, a mind that followed ever the present mood, and turned not itself to that most desirable, little thought of the past, and a dilatory idling for the future kept me lower than I ought to have been; as, to my cost, I found, when willing to retrace my steps, the pathway was too choked up to be pursued. Thus it has ever been, as I have seen times upon times—we value that most which we have lost for ever.

"If I lament in mine old age that I used not the good gifts of God as I might have done, yet do I comfort myself with the thought that I had a smattering of everything, and that a cheerful spirit and ready wit made some amends for deeper knowledge.

"If I was remarkable for no one thing, still I did not make my life subservient to one end, the which I have seen in persons possessed of great talent. They sacrificed all else to it, until he or she that had it came to live for no other end, to the extinction of all other good and pleasure.

"A moderate capacity, a large heart, an unenvious mind, methinks, are as good gifts as any God hath to bestow out of his bounty.

"*My Faults.*—Let me humbly adventure this theme, and, in laying bare my faults, I would have truth at my elbow, while my pen shall be as the pen of one who writeth what the Almighty Eye doth read.

"I do not hold my temper to be good—it is generous but passionate, and hath, for my misfortune, a smack of sulkiness in it, not usual with hot blood.

"In my passion there was no bound to that I did say, and in my sulks there was no reason that did rule me. In either way there was that extreme which ensueth from one that is unstable in character. And I reaped the fruits thereof, to mine own sore hurt.

"I think not that I have any vice or ill-way, the which might shame those who named me, or cause me to shun the fair face of day, or droop mine eye when it meets that of friend or foe. And for this let me thank God who hath so blessed me.

"I love not low things—of fashions cunning and artful I have a horror, as of living devils. Yet was I not so staunch a friend but that I have listened, and, mayhap, believed, what a keener, more subtle wit descried at once. I trusted the judgment of others sooner than mine own, and gladly shuffled on their shoulders the charges of a responsible question. And so, when left to mine own self, I was ever muddling and halting between right and wrong. Conscious, within myself, that I was no whit inferior to many of those whom I suffered to lead me, yet was I, at times, their very scapegoat.

"The desire to be friendly, the wish to wound no one's feelings, the boast that all should love me, each in their several turn suffered rude buffets and shocks when least expected. I do not find I was ever the more respected, the more I did strive to please. It is the nature of the world to take advantage of those who permit it. Doubtless I was often beguiled to do things that I liked not, and as often got but laughter, perhaps ingratitude, for my pains.

"In the summing up of my sins, year by year, I did ever find that my over-vivid imagination was my chiefest ill. It grew with the exercise thereof, and folks waxed chary of that I had to tell, by reason that the tale could scarce bear sifting. Yet did I love truth, in a sort, so as to worship it, and with a hard struggle did, in later years, keep my tongue and my wit in the straight road.

"Thus I have shewn that God gave me exceeding good gifts, the which, if I did not use as I ought to have done, I can but blame my own self. Looking back, I can see how I was led by the 'hand of my Father,' safe through many a quicksand wherein others fell, to their utter mischance.

"I was like, at one time, to be overcome by vain conceits. But in this the shifting nature of my character, ebbing and flowing according to those I lived with, something saved me. I would be full of vanities at one time, and at another I heeded nothing of all that had so delighted me. I did love praise always, but was so far just to myself that I rejoiced not in it but when I felt it my due. I loved not those austere folk who look upon praise as a snare, and who consider they do the Almighty a wrong to think good of those He himself made and died for.

"'Well done, thou good and faithful servant!' doth the Lord say Himself. And methinks there is a rare pleasure in commending a fellow-mortal, that exceedeth even the pleasure of being commended.

"Thus have I summed up (it may be boastfully) my character, to which I am minded to add a short account of that outside cover within which God did encase the soul and spirit I have now described.

"In person I am above the middle height, with dark hair and dark eyes. I have a fair skin, that doth easily colour and fade—but mostly I am pale, the which is the natural colour of that fine-grained skin which is called Italian. Of my features it may be said they were not faultless, neither were they uncommendable. My nose was straight, but something large; and my mouth was, beyond question, and, much to my secret dolour, of a great size too, though I had well-formed lips, of a ruddy colour, that set off my teeth, of which, for evenness, whiteness, and good strength, I desired, nor could any desire better. They did me good service without pain or loss until I was past sixty, at which period some loosened, and came out of their beds, sound and good in themselves, but rootless. And from that time to this the like hath happened. Nevertheless, I have still enough, and to spare, for that work for which they were given me. We, in old age, can do with

less of everything than in middle age. Like children, we require our food soft, and in less quantities, but more often, so that I need not mourn for what I want not. But in very truth, I was somewhat vain of my teeth, and was apt to console myself for the width of my mouth by the thought I had two such goodly rows of ivory to show.

"My chin was round and full, something cleft in the middle, and on one cheek I had an ever-speaking dimple that did show itself in all changes of my face. Of my forehead it may be truly said it was the index of my mind, as far as frankness and a love of knowledge went. It was not so high as broad, and, having seldom occasion to frown, it was unruffled by seams. Down the middle it had a cleft, which I was well pleased at being told belonged to none who were not upright and noble in their thoughts. My head was small, and sat with an easy grace on my throat, which looked the longer because I had sloping shoulders. I was always well commended for my figure, and I found in myself an artless pride, that did take delight in easy and graceful motion, in a natural uprightness of figure, and in the proper form and usage of my hands. These last were white and well-shapen—so that I did show a conceit in the showing of them, that, verily, had it been expressed in words, I had blushed for shame.

"Thus God had been good to me in making me of that appearance which displeased none, but the rather got me commended, as is ever the fashion of this world, which liketh that it looketh on, ere it proveth if the looking is worth the liking. My Mr. Mallerdean did always say that in any company, be it of the greatest and best, I was the fairest she in it. The which did so far please me, that I did hope all other wives did hear the same.

"And now for mine experience of the changes in my long life. In my youth I was ever full of vivacity and romance. So quick were my susceptibilities, that the world seemed to me more happy than heaven. In my womanhood I trod, for the first time, the rough path of enthusiasm and disappointment. I kept by me the keen relish for enjoyment. I loved dress and praise; but I felt a void in the realization of one or the other. I turned to literature, and began to be critical and nice. As I was disappointed in one thing, I tried another. The extatic feelings of youth seemed to have left me. Anon came middle age, and with that I did fancy I should have the right feelings thereof, and become demure, somewhat cynical, with a disposition to advise and admonish. But age overtook me ere I ceased to feel young—or the rather, I began to feel younger. Leaving behind me the briary path of responsibility and warning, I did dash once more into the smooth but treacherous vortex of pleasing mine own self, regardless of all others. This was followed by an era of self-reproach—of somewhat that may be styled remorse—of a lowness of heart, and a trembling fear as to the use of this world—the benefit of being born. So far from the earth presenting an appearance to me faire than that of heaven, it assumed a dark, gloomy aspect. My temper, always quick,

now became irascible—the least trifle irritated me. I was, as it were, always in the slumbering of a storm, which was ready to awaken at any moment. Angry with myself, cold to those I ought to love, vexed with the world, pleased with nothing therein, desiring to be lonely in my moroseness, yet eagerly greedy of love and praise, I led me a sad life. Then I remembered the Rock of Ages, to which all souls, wrecked and in danger of life, cling, and are saved. After a while I turned me into the calm and pure haven of old age, from whence I look out on to the broad ocean of life, with a heart that overflows with love for all I see, with a soul that is ever murmuring in gratitude to God, that the close of my life is so like the beginning, full of blissful anticipations.

“A little cry smote upon mine ear as I thought thus. I opened mine eyes—long shut with this discourse to myself—wondering that any should feel pain with a Father in heaven to turn to.

“All the little children playing on the floor were gone save one, and she, the little image of myself, that a while ago had mocked at her sister. From her rose the bitter cry that pained me, as it had been an echo from mine own heart, when I was astray and lost.

“‘Child, what aileth thee?’ I said, laying my old hand on her young head.

“‘Granny, they are gone—all gone ; and I am left at home alone.’

“‘Hast thou been wilful, child?’

“‘Yes, granny ; I had words with Lisbeth—she vexed me, and I raised my hand and slapped her on the face.’

“‘Woes me, child, Cain struck his brother Abel.’

“‘But, granny, it was only a slap, and see how I am punished ! They are gone—all gone to the child’s dance. There is to be a fine play of dogs, that do act like Christians, and fire guns. And there is a woman that goeth into the fire, and eateth it without hurt ; and oh ! granny, there is a mighty conjurer, who doth bring fine peacocks out of penny boxes, and maketh little trees to grow and flower in a minute ; and oh ! oh ! granny, all my sisters are to wear their new blue shoes.’

“‘Thou mayst put on thy blue shoes at home.’

“‘But, granny, there is no one to see them but thee. Oh ! I am unhappy ; if I live to be a hundred, or as old as you, granny, I shall never be so miserable as now.’

“Even as the little one spoke, sobbing between each word, the door opened, and her elder sister, she whom she had slapped, entered.

“Then I saw the little passionate face change suddenly. A pallor came over it, as if indeed she felt now, and now only, the pang of unhappiness. I could feel the little heart throb as she leant against me.

“‘Granny,’ quoth the elder one, ‘wilt thou honour us with an invitation to sup with thee ? And wilt thou accept our services as thy dutiful entertainers ?’

“‘Right willingly, Lisbeth ; how is it thou hast stayed behind ?’



“‘It was at mine own choice, granny.’

“‘For the sake of this little disgraced one?’

“‘We will call her unhappy, grandamma ; for if she is disgraced, so am I. There were two of us in the quarrel, and it was not meet that one should be merry, and the other in sorrow.’

“As I took hold of Lisbeth’s hand, in token of love, I looked hard at the little one.

“‘Oh, granny !’ she cried, impetuously throwing her arms round her sister’s neck, ‘it is true ; this is worse to bear than mine own grief. Sister, it is not too late. Run, let us run to prepare you. I thought I was miserable just now, but I shall indeed be happier than I can say, if I but see thee going to the child’s dance. Come, sister, come, bethink thee of the fire-woman, the dancing-dogs ; and oh ! the conjurer, doing all the fine things thou lovest so well.’

“‘I think this finest of all, that thou and I sup with and wait on our granny.’

“And she smiled right happily, looking withal so well content, and so pretty, that there was no more to be said.

“But the little one kissed her heartily, with great sweet kisses ; then she ran and fetched her her blue shoes, but the elder sister laughed and said,

“‘I wot me mine old ones will do.’

“At meal-time the little one did watch her sister, and wait on her, as a patient spaniel might watch the looks of her master. She did invent wants for her, and made believe as the nimble upright maiden had a need of cushions and stools, such as her grandam of fourscore did use. And Lisbeth gravely accepted the service, as if, indeed, she was in sore need of all.

“Then I bethought me I too might do my part towards the better passing of the evening. It was true I was no conjurer, and I was not minded to try if I could eat fire. Also I knew not the art to make dogs dance, nor peacocks to rise out of penny boxes. Nevertheless my long life had been passed to little purpose if old age was unable to entertain youth. I did bethink me that stories of the past, of those things that happened to me when I was their age, had, perchance, a charm in them. The little one would be amazed to think that her old grandam had her fits of passion and remorse ; and if I did tell her of the storm beating against my chamber window, which did cause me to feel I had a soul, perchance this evening, begun so sadly to her, might be that turning-point which would teach her the same lesson.

“I was never much given to lecturing of young folk, and I liked not speechifying and arguing ; but the rather I would draw on those erring ones, even as my Father had drawn me.

“So when our supping was over, I did send the one to my chamber for a rare old cabinet that oftimes they had gazed at in wonderment ; and the other to my woman for the key thereof which was kept in a silken bag that lay always at my bed-head.

"When they returned I did put me the cabinet before me, and I bid the children sit one on each side of me.

"Truly one might have said, from the eagerness of their faces, that they were about to see greater wonders than all those bewitching sights promised at the child's dance, and which they had lost the sight of—the one by her sin, and the other by her goodness.

"Nevertheless, ere I pulled forth the key from its silken bag, the younger did say,

"Will it please you stay a moment, granny, I think my sister will see better if I put the candle on her side."

"But what wilt thou do?"

"Oh! I can see well, and, sister, art thou comfortable? Shall I fetch thee the other cushion?"

"And the little face, so eager in its tender love, so soft in its sweet remorse and coaxing ways, seemed to me as lovely a sight as mine eyes had ever seen.

"And the elder maiden blew her kisses of thanks over the cabinet, the soft breath of which stirred my white hair, as if some angel was breathing near me.

"The little one had felt the something of her soul this night, and was never more to lose the perception thereof; while the elder one learnt the power of that virtue which teacheth, 'A soft answer turneth away wrath.'


"So I put the key into my cabinet, and opened the doors thereof.

"At first there was no more to be seen than the outside of five drawers, none of the same size, the topmost being the smallest, and the bottom one the largest.

"Before I open these drawers, my grandchildren, I must tell you that each contains that I most valued at five different periods of my life. Within this upper drawer are the treasures of my childhood. In the second those of my girlhood. The third is very closely packed with all the sweet memories and tokens of my happy married days. The one beneath it is scarcely less dear to me, because it is devoted to the loves that existed between me and my children. The last one, though the largest, is the most empty. The likes and friendships of later years have not the romance and fervour of youth and early life, and many passed away without a token left that they ever existed. Now thou shalt have the history of each in its turn; and doubtless thou wilt find, when the time arrives that thou hast to open thy cabinet of memory, and recall the pleasures, the hopes, the sins and omissions of the five periods of your lives, that thou wilt have cause, as thine old grandam hath, "to praise the Lord for His goodness, and to declare the wonders that He doeth for the children of men."'"

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

## EXPERIENCES OF JOHN MALLERDEAN.

“ WISH,” said I, “that she had told us her story. What a dear old lady she must have been ! But here is another paper, endorsed in her own handwriting :—‘The strange experience that befell my husband’s cousin, John Mallerdean, of the county of Essex,—he wrote it for me when he came to visit us once. He and his wife died within a few weeks of each other. Their son was killed in the American war, and having no other children nor relatives who needed any of the world’s goods, they left all their substance to different charities—(Tobit 4, Proverbs 19.)—He and his wife lie buried in one of the old churches in Bristol, along with their children, who passed away in infancy.’ Peter, did you know of these relations ?”

“Yes, I have heard of them ; and I knew there was some romantic story attached to them. Let us hear it—I wonder whether it will be as wonderful as Nurse Alexander’s dreams.”

“John Mallerdean was born in Essex, miles away from the sea, in a large old-fashioned house of black and white, the upper story of which overhung the lower, and the door of which stood back in a deep porch. The joists and floors were of fine oak, and all the tables, benches, presses—indeed all the furniture—was of oak ; some of it rude and clumsy, but the greater part beautifully carved.

“My first notions of Bible history were taken from my mother’s bedstead, which was entirely of oak, and carved all over with figures of angels, Adam and Eve, the serpent, and the Virgin and Child.

“The house was called the Old Hall. It stood at some distance from the road ; a gate on the road-side led up a paved way with a row of sheds filled with carts, ploughs, and farming implements, on one hand, and a large cattle-pond on the other, into a spacious farm-yard built round with stables, barns, and outbuildings, all wearing an old Saxon stamp that I have never seen elsewhere. A wicket gate on the side of the yard opened into a large garden which fronted the house. This garden had several broad gravel walks, and two alleys covered with turf, and hedged with yew trees cut into all manner of quaint devices. Beyond the garden was an orchard containing, amongst other trees, some old mulberry trees, which my sister and myself were taught to regard with great reverence.

“Beyond this orchard lay ploughed fields and meadows, all belonging to my father. No other dwelling was in sight, except a few cottages belonging to the farm-servants.

“My father and mother were cousins, and both were descended from the same old Saxon family, who had possessed their land long

before the Conquest. In the course of years the property had dwindled down to the farm on which I was born. We had no relations. There certainly was an uncle, a merchant in Bristol, of whom I sometimes heard; but he was an offshoot of a distant branch, and, being in trade, was considered to have forfeited all claim to be regarded as one of the family.

"I was the only son. I had one sister two years younger than myself—a gentle, pretty child, with long golden locks. She was called Edith. All the education I received was two years at the grammar-school—a curious old endowment, held by a 'clerk in orders,' to teach Latin and scholarship to all the boys in the parish of Ledgeley Laver. There were about a dozen besides myself; and unless the master had been endowed with the common sense to teach us writing and arithmetic, and a few common branches of education, I don't think we should have had more learning than Tom Thumb carried in money from King Arthur's treasury: which, as everybody knows, was a silver threepence. My companions were the sons of small farmers, and came at intervals, when they were not wanted at home.

"My sister Edith never went to school at all; she stayed at home with my mother, and was taught to be notable. As we continually heard that we were all that remained of a branch of the oldest family in England, we learned to attach a mysterious importance to ourselves.

"So we grew up, and did not find our lives dull, although my sister never left the house, except sometimes to go to church. When I myself was sixteen, I had never been as far as Drayton Ledgeley, though it was only twelve miles from Ledgeley Laver, which was our market-town. In those days people did not go travelling and rambling about as they do now.

"I might be about fifteen, when, one day, my father brought home from market a book of voyages and travels, as a present for me. I had done some farm work in a way that pleased him. It was the first new book out of shop I had ever possessed; and I read it aloud at night, whilst my father smoked in the chimney-corner, and my mother and sister were busy knitting and spinning.

"That book made a great impression upon me, and set my mind thinking of foreign parts, and might have something to do with what I am about to relate; mind, I do not assert that it had! I am cautious how I assert anything but what I know for a fact.

"The night on which I finished reading that book was the thirty-first of January, 1715; the date is remembered by others as well as myself. That night I went to bed as usual, and dreamed a long, consecutive dream, such as I never dreamed before or since. I dreamed that my uncle at Bristol sent for me to go a long voyage, on some business of his; and then I found myself standing on a quay, where there seemed hundreds of ships, and all their thin upright masts standing like a forest of poplar trees in winter. I knew they were ships, though I had

never seen one. I heard somebody say, 'This is Bristol.' I do not recollect anything about my uncle, nor the business I was going about. I had to go across several vessels, into one that lay outside the dock ; sailors were going about in all directions, and there was a great deal of confusion. A large gilded figurehead of a woman was at one end of the vessel, and 'Phœbe Sutcliffe' was written under it ; I thought it was the likeness of Phœbe Sutcliffe. I had never seen the sea nor a ship before, but I did not feel at all surprised at anything. I looked out on the green waves that were rippling against the side of the vessel ; as the ship began to move on, as far out as I could see, there was nothing but water. I thought it all looked quite right and natural, and the sun was shining quite bright upon some little boats with white sails. The ship had moved a little distance, when a voice called, loud and clear, for us to stop, and a young man, with a portmanteau of a curious shape, came scrambling up the side of our vessel, out of a little boat ; he came up close to where I was standing. He was a very handsome young man, and he wore a foreign cap.

"We began to talk, but I could never in the least recollect what he said. Suddenly a great storm arose, and everything was dark. I heard the wind howl fearfully, but did not feel any tossing of the waves, as might have been expected. At last there came a dreadful crash ; another vessel had struck against us, and we were borne down under the keel of it. I found myself in the water. The young man was close beside me ; he pushed a hen-coop to me, and we floated quite pleasantly and easily towards some rocks which lay around a beautiful green island where the sun was shining. The rocks, when we came among them, were like the ruins of a hundred old castles.

" 'These are the Rocks of Scarlet in the Isle of Man,' said my companion ; 'I live here, and yonder is my father's house.'

"When we had clambered up the rocks, and had reached the green-sward, I thought I was unable to move a step farther. A white house, with green outside shutters, and surrounded by a low wall, stood close at hand ; but I could not stir, and lay down on the ground fainting, though I knew all that was going on. My companion shouted, and some men came up ; he sent them to the white house. In another minute I saw a beautiful young woman, clothed in white, with long black curls, standing beside us. With her was an old man.

" 'How did you come here ?' said the old man.

"We were struck by another vessel, and swam to shore ; but this youth is dying. Give him a cordial.'

"The young lady stooped over me, raised my head, and was extending her hand for a drinking horn, when the cliff we were upon began to quake, and fell with an awful crash into the sea beneath.

"The crash awoke me. I sprang up in bed, without in the least knowing where I was. The noise I had heard in my dream still continued. My father burst into my room, saying,

" 'Come away, boy ! Save yourself ! The house is falling !'

"I was completely bewildered. I did not know where I was, nor whether it was a continuation of my dream ; but my father dragged me out of bed, and we all took refuge in the kitchen.

"A terrible storm was raging ; every blast seemed as if it would blow the house down. A stack of chimneys fell with a terrific crash, and the kitchen window was at the same moment blown in. My mother and the maid-servants knelt down to prayers in a corner, while my father and myself strove to fasten up a strong oak shutter. At length, towards morning, the violence of the gale abated, and we were able to go out to see what damage had been done.

"'God help all the poor souls who have been at sea this night,' said my mother pitifully.

"I started. I was one of those for whom my mother was praying. Had *I* not been to sea ? And had *I* not been wrecked ? And was it not all as real as the scene now before me ? I was frightened, for I did not know but that I might be under witchcraft, of which I had been told much, and which, in that part of the country, we all believed in. However, I said nothing, but followed my father out of doors.

"A scene of great damage and desolation there presented itself ; the roof had been blown from the barn ; the ground was covered with bricks and tiles and branches of trees : all the lead-work from the roof had been torn off, and hung down, twisted like icicles. The garden was laid waste ; and, in the orchard, two of our beloved mulberry trees were uprooted, as well as a fine old elm, and several fruit trees.

"The wind was still too high to make it safe for us to be abroad ; tiles, and stones, and branches of trees were still, from time to time, falling about. The damage done by that storm was fearful, and was recollected through the county for many a year afterwards.

"For weeks we were all too busy repairing the effects of the storm for any one to bestow much attention upon me ; but at last my father began to complain that I was good for nothing, and that I went about my work as if I were dazed. My mother agreed that I had never been the same lad since that awful night, and questioned me whether anything had hurt my head.

"The fact was that the whole tenor of my life was broken, and I could not take it up again ; I could not forget my strange dream. I was separated from that lovely young lady and her brother, who were more real to me than the people I saw and spoke to every day, and I felt lonely and miserable. The White House on the cliff, and the Scarlet Rocks—what had become of them ? Had the house really been swallowed in the sea ? I was consumed by a constant sense of disgust and misery. The only hope I had was that some night I might dream again and hear what had become of them all. But I never dreamed again, and at last I began to lose my rest.

"Every day the dream haunted me more vividly, and when I thought

I should never see those two beings more, I felt mad and suffocated with baffled hopes.

"At length the change in me grew so alarming, that a doctor was called in. He shook his head when he saw me, and said that I must be sent away from home, have plenty of change, and be kept amused, or I should go mad.

"Whilst my father and mother were shocked and perplexed by what the doctor had said, and wondering whether going to market with my father, and a visit for a day to the town of Ledgeley Drayton, would not be the sort of thing he had recommended, a letter came. Now a letter was a very great event in our house; I do not think my father had ever received more than three in his life. He would not have received this letter in question for the next fortnight, if one of the farm-servants had not been sent to the town for some horse-medicine, and the post-office chanced to be next door.

"The letter, written in a clear stiff hand, proved to be from my uncle at Bristol; it stated that he was getting old, and, having no children, wished to see me; that he and my father had seen less of each other than relations ought. He wanted some one to go and look after his estate in Antigua, and if my father would spare me to him for a short time, he would make it worth my while. A bank note for a hundred pounds was enclosed, to pay the expenses of my journey, and to buy some present for my mother and sister.

"There were difficulties raised, and objections made; but I heard the magic word "Bristol," which was the first stage in my dream, and I insisted, resolutely and passionately, on going. Of course I prevailed. I had never been from home before, but I felt sure I should find my way. I was impatient till I set off; my father saw me to the mail, and I reached Bristol without accident, and with the vague idea that I had seen all I now saw of it before.

"My uncle was a little, dry, spare old man, dressed in a snuff-coloured suit, with grey silk stockings and silver buckles. He received me very kindly, and took me about to see the sights as he called them. But the docks were the only sight I cared for.

"My uncle had a notion—rather a curious one—that having been brought up on my father's land all my life, I must of necessity understand how an estate ought to be managed, and this is why he informed me one day that he intended to send me on the voyage to Antigua.

"I obtained my father's consent, and my uncle gave me instructions as to what I was to do when I got there. I had been accustomed to look after our men at home, and I knew how my father managed them, so that what my uncle wanted did not come very strange to me.

"One morning, at breakfast, my uncle read a letter which seemed to please him; he rubbed his hands and said,

"Well, lad, after breakfast we must go down and take your berth

I did think of sending you in the *Lively Anne*, but it seems the *Phoebe Sutcliffe* will sail first.'

"I put my hand to my forehead ; I did not know which was the dream or which was the reality.

"That day week saw me on board the *Phoebe Sutcliffe*, and clearing out of the harbour. On just such a day, and amid just such a scene, as I had beheld in my dream.

"But one thing befell me which I had not taken into account, and which I had not dreamed—I became dreadfully sea-sick ; a startling novelty which for the time effectually banished everything but a sense of present misery.

"When I recovered a little, I went on deck. My attention was that instant drawn to a portmanteau which I well remembered. A handsome young man, in a foraging cap, was leaning against the side of the vessel, watching a flock of sea-gulls ; I knew him again directly. We were standing near each other, and he addressed me, as I expected he would. I was curious to know what our conversation would be, as I did not, and never could, recollect what we had said when we met in our former state of existence—I mean in my dream. It was ordinary young men's conversation ; we began with shooting sea-gulls, and went off upon shooting and field-sports in general. He told me he was in the army, and had been a great deal abroad, and was now on his way to join his regiment in Antigua. I was delighted to hear it, and waited with placid curiosity to see how much more of my dream would come true.

"Towards afternoon a thick fog came on, increasing in density until we could not see across the ship. He proposed that we should go below. 'No,' said I, 'don't go below ! You forget how soon the vessel will come upon us that is to bear us down.' A pang of mortal fear came into my heart as I realized the terrible moment that lay before us.

"'What are you talking of ?' said he, in a tone of great surprise.

"'Perhaps the vessel may not come !' said I, 'but we had better remain on deck.'

"The words were scarcely spoken, when our vessel struck. I recollect hearing a horrible grating, grinding sound, as if all the planks were being crushed in like pasteboard ; it lasted for a second only. I did not regain my senses until a sharp sense of pain aroused me. I had been dashed upon a low sharp-pointed ledge of rocks ; beyond those rocks I saw meadows and houses, lying in a bright, clear, moonlight. It was a momentary consciousness only that I had. I remember no more until I found myself in a bed hung round with white curtains. I tried to raise my arm, and fainted with pain. I lay, I know not how long after this, in a troubled stupor, vaguely sensible of people moving about, but unable to move, or even to open my eyes.

"At last I once more recovered my consciousness, and did not again lose it. I was told by an old woman, who was sitting at my



bedside, that I had been flung by the sea upon the Rocks of Scarlet, in the Isle of Man. That I had been taken up for dead, and brought into her cottage, and that the doctor had said I was not to be allowed to speak on any account. She gave me a few spoonfuls of something, whether of food or medicine I could not tell, and I fell asleep.

"When I awoke, my eyes rested on my companion on board ship. Beside him stood the beautiful lady of my dream !

" 'Am I alive, or am I dreaming again, as I did once before ? ' I asked.

" 'You are alive, and will live, I hope, for a long time ; you are not dreaming. This is my sister Agatha, who has had her hands full with nursing both of us, though I escaped better than you did. When you are able to stir, we will remove you to my father's house, but in the meanwhile you must keep quiet.'

" 'But tell me, I implore you, was not the white house, where your father lives, swallowed up in the sea when the cliff fell ?'

" 'Not at all ! It stands where it always did ; and now, not another word.'

"I was shortly afterwards removed to my friend's house, which was on a hill, about a quarter of a mile from the rocks, and was the same house I had seen in my dream.

"My friend's father was Colonel Panton ; he was on half-pay, and lived there with his daughter. His son and myself were the only survivors from the terrible catastrophe of the *Phæbe Sutcliffe*.

"I, of course, lost no time in communicating with my friends ; but I remained at the White House until my health was established.

"I confided my dream to Agatha, with whom it is needless to say I had fulfilled my destiny, and fallen in love. She loved me in return, and her father gave his consent that we should be married 'when we came to years of discretion.'

"When I went home, her brother accompanied me, and he fell in love with my little sister Edith, to which she nor any one else made the slightest objection. Frederic and Edith have been long married, and are very happy. I went to Antigua at last, and was detained there much longer than I liked ; but on my return, at the end of two years, I was married to Agatha. Who has been the best wife to me man ever had.

"My uncle died, and left me the bulk of his property ; I only hope I may be enabled to use it well and wisely to my life's end.

"Although my life has been of such unlooked-for prosperity, I would counsel no one to desire to have their future shadowed to them in a dream. Dreams without end have no meaning in them, and never come to anything ; yet, still, this dream of mine fell out exactly as I have told it."

"Well," said I, on finishing this MS., "I shall tell this story to Nurse Alexander, and hear what she says to it. I wish I could dream

such steady, clear, consecutive dreams, it would make sleep very entertaining."

"Or as painful as our waking life is sometimes made," said Peter. "Unconsciousness is the great refreshment of life."

"But," I replied, "to be reunited in dreams to those whom we have loved, and who have gone before us, would rob bereavement of its desolation, and be a consolation under a burden of grief too heavy to be borne."

"My dear Dulce," said Peter, "under any sorrow laid upon us, it is better to pray for patience than to seek too eagerly for consolation. Sorrow is sent to us that we may bear it, and we lose the lesson and the blessing contained within an affliction when we think only of assuaging the smart."

"I will try to remember your words, Peter; but I hope that the sorrow will not come in the shape of ill or suffering to you or little Peter. Anything but that!"

"Make no exceptions, dear love!"

But Peter gathered me in his arms, and kissed me with trembling tenderness, as though he feared the end. He clung to me as much as I clung to him.

"Come," said he, cheerfully, "let us see if my dear old grandmother has left any more relics in these other drawers."

There were five drawers remaining. In the top one there was a scrap of paper, on which was written: "Each of these drawers contains what I most valued at different periods of my life." But they were otherwise empty.

"I wish," I said, "there were an account of these treasures. I would like to know what were the treasures so prized nearly one hundred years ago."

"I fancy that affection had the same mode of expressing itself then as now."

"I wonder how those people live who have not felt what it is to love—to love as you and I do?"

"And how is that? Tell me, that I may know if we think alike."

"I feel only half myself when you are not by. Whatever I do has reference to you. I have no thought that does not begin and end in you. I have no wish until I hear what you wish—no pleasure until I see you pleased. Grief comes to me through you, otherwise I should feel none, knowing you are near me. I am glad of morning, that I may see you. I welcome night, that I may whisper how much I love you. To walk with you seems to me a double pleasure. I drink in God's air and happiness without limit. I welcome our meals because I sit close by your side, and can do little services for you. But mostly do I feel how I love you when I pray to God. Then it seems to me as if my soul and your soul were blended in one. And only when I beseech Him to make me worthy of thee do I say I instead of we."

"Sweet Dulce ! I love you like a man who, Adam-like, had a paradise alone, but did not know the wealth of his possession until his Eve came to share it with him."

"What can jealousy be, Peter ? It seems to me that under no circumstances could I doubt you."

"And yet, love, I have heard it said there is no true love without jealousy."

"To doubt is not to love. I lay my hands in yours, and trust myself to you blindfold."

"May God help me to fulfil the trust ! I think a love like ours tends to piety and humility. I feel so afraid of any taint of human sin coming between me and my love for you, that I rely more upon the help of God, than my own will, to do my duty by you. It seems to me since I married that I am a worthier man. I am no longer subject to fits of passion—we Mallerdeans, Dulce, have never been famous for good tempers."

I could not help smiling. I thought I knew a good deal more of the temper of one of the family than he did.

"Why do you smile ? What is it, darling ? Did I ever show a trace of it to you ?"

"No, no—vanish such an idea for ever !"

"But your smile said so much."

"Smiles don't express unhappiness—be content with that."

Peter looked at me a moment, and then seemed to guess what I meant.

"It seems strange that, loving you as I do, my sister, who has hitherto seen with my eyes, and thought with my thoughts, does not love you too."

"Humph !" said I, "there may be several reasons for her antipathy."

"Good Heaven ! what a term to use ! You are not going to persuade me that a mortal lives who has, or can have, an antipathy to you ?"

"The very fact of your loving me so much helps her to discern faults in me to which you are blind."

"But an antipathy !"

"That is a strong word, but it is the proper one. It expresses that feeling which irresistibly makes even people's virtues displeasing to some minds. They say that bees have antipathies, Peter."

He shook his head, and seemed to brood over what I said.

In a man love bids him fear nothing. In a woman love fears everything. His strong nature seems invigorated by his love. She is strong in nothing but her love.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

## SOCIAL LIFE SIXTY YEARS AGO.

**T**HE contested election had left much bitterness of feeling behind. People who had been on opposite sides would no longer speak to each other, or meet in society. Peter, anxious to make it once more the social and hospitable county it had always been, decreed that we should open Mallerdean House, and try the effect of giving some entertainments.

I was assailed by what would now be called a fit of nervousness as to how I should pass through the ordeal ; but this gave way before the still graver dread of the consequences between Lady Lanton and myself. People were disposed to like me, and I met their kindness quite half-way ; my sister-in-law was so injudicious as to resent all civility shown to me. So short-sighted was she as to the consequences of her own ill-temper, so blind to the construction people put upon her treatment of me, that, for the sake of our family credit I thought I would try to get her to consent to an apparent truce, at any rate.

"You tell me," I said to her, "how much you despise me, and as long as you show your dislike only to me, I can endure it ; but do not let it appear in public. Do not let our disunion be seen—let us at least unite in the exercise of Mallerdean hospitality. You need not be jealous. You shall take the lead in all things ; believe me I do not wish to intrude on any of your accustomed rights and privileges. I only ask you to speak peaceably to me."

"Jealous ! Jealous of you ! The girl is mad !" she said, in her hard, clear voice. "You have set my brother on the folly of making peace and conciliating enmities. You ought to be ashamed of your despicable spirit ! Because I have a memory, because I know who were the friends of Mallerdean, and who were not, you, without sense, without judgment, may forgive them ; but I do not, and shall never do so."

"Is it judicious to keep up this resentment, when your brother is so anxious to restore the peace of the county ?"

"He has not thought proper to consult me. Hitherto his first, his chiefest counsellor, I am now thrust aside. Your arts have separated us. I am frank, I speak the truth—I detest you ! I am quite willing the world should know it—the world expects it of me."

"The world judges for itself—it cares no more for you than for me, but amuses itself meanwhile with the spectacle of our disagreements. For Peter's sake let us be friends."

"I tell you I hate your pretended artlessness and innocence—your pretence of amiability. I hate the very sight of your face, the sound of your voice. I scorn to hide my opinion of you. You of course,

coming from an inferior station, feel the need of conciliating everybody. You are contemptible to me—and hateful!”

She raised her hand and shook her fingers in my face with a gesture of scorn no words could express. I felt as though they darted fire at me.

She left the room as though she had blotted me out, and I no longer existed. Lady Lanton had allowed her imperious temper and inordinate self-love to go uncontrolled until it amounted to insanity; when crossed or opposed she lost all judgment.

I have known her rail at the elements as if they were human beings—as if the winds arose, and storms ensued, and rain fell solely to annoy her. When a human being ventured to oppose her, it was well for him she was not an Eastern despot. Seeing her, I could understand the stories I had read of the cruelty of tyrants. At times she was not in her senses, but she had the power and the cunning to control herself before her brother. She was always smiling and polite to me when he was by.

However strong the contradiction of human nature, or because she had hurt the self-love of all our neighbours, and they were glad to contradict her, it so happened that the very fact of her enmity to me roused their good-will for me.

As she would not make peace, I said nothing to Peter, but prepared to do the honours of a great house as a great lady ought to do. It was not quite so formidable a matter as I expected. Lady Harpendale was so good as to say I received my company with an air so cordial and happy that they all felt at home immediately. She had always considered that the great art in making guests happy was to cause them to feel at home.

“By-the-bye,” said she to me one day, “I am glad to see that you have a very nice assortment of books in your closet. I ventured to take some of them up, for I am myself passionately fond of reading.”

“My father is so good, madam, as to recommend those that he thinks will benefit me. I have heard it whispered that Mr. Mallerdean is very highly thought of by his party, and that, should the Whigs come into power, he may have a seat in the Cabinet. So, madam, I am desirous that his wife should not be an ignorant person; and I am endeavouring to make myself more worthy of him. I am perfecting myself in foreign languages, and reading history. But I am more idle than I ought to be.”

“Your pretty boy does great credit to his mamma. You were right and brave, my dear, to decide upon being his nurse. I sent my little ones, as they were born, to country nurses. Out of nine children I have but three living, and I never lose the thought that they owe their early deaths to their own mother, who was too much a creature of form and etiquette to take care of what God gave her.”

It was sad to see tears falling from such aged eyes for the death of little babes whom she would soon behold.

"Madam," I said, gently kissing her hand, "who amongst us will live to your age without bitter regrets for what cannot be recalled? In Heaven you will find your little children. They will be waiting for you at the gate, all safe in God's own keeping."

"God bless you, my dear, there is comfort in the thought. Had they lived, out of so many one might have gone astray, and I should have had to shed more bitter tears for a lost soul than I now do for a lost life. But let me wipe my sorrow from my face; I am not used to tears, but there is something in your gentle manner, my young friend, your pretty sympathising look, that opens all hearts to you. God bless you, my dear, in all you do, for I am sure it will be for good."

"Thank you, madam, for your goodness to me. This emboldens me to ask your help in giving a little entertainment to-day. My sister is the mistress of all here, and to her is owing those arrangements which have pleased you so much in the house; but I have a little cottage of my own. I can only entertain you in cottage fashion, but, if you will kindly consider that worth having, I feel sure the rest of our noble guests will follow so good an example."

"Ah! my dear, you have discovered the art of beguiling people to your wishes. How much I shall like the cottage feast!"

"If you please, madam, my cottage is small. Fine silks and satins cannot have room there. I should wish my visitors to be attired cottage fashion."

"I will set the example, but more I cannot promise."

The fashionable dinner-hour of that period was four o'clock, but, on the day of my cottage fête, we dined at two. After it was over, we left the gentlemen to their wine. The ladies went to play at dressing themselves like cottagers—the idea had taken their fancy. I went with Buffy and his brothers, their nurses, and my little Peter with his nurse, together with my own maid, to prepare our feast. We decorated the cottage with flowers, we ornamented the tea-table with nosegays tied with ribbon. The two beautiful cows, Arcadia and Erminia, were brought close to the window and tethered, that we might each milk our own syllabubs if we chose. The tea-cups and saucers were all of lovely old Indian china. There was a profusion of dainty cakes, which, in those days, were greatly sought after. And one very popular dish was the finest and whitest bread and butter, just sprinkled with white sugar.

Upstairs I made all the chambers sweet and gay with lavender and flowers.

For entertainment I had books of rare prints arranged in the parlour, and cabinets of curiosities. Buffy and I were beginning to make collections of different matters in natural history. At present, however, we were not learned enough to class them by their Latin names, but it was our intention to do so some day. The eggs of birds in their different nests attracted the most attention, not only by the

beauty of their construction, but because of the great variety and singular difference amongst them.

After the nests the portfolios of dried grasses and ferns excited most pleasure. But I am anticipating.

As I prepared to receive my company, I had but one fear, namely, some secret plot on the part of Lady Lanton to throw ridicule on my party. If it had not been for the pleasure of dressing themselves in Arcadian costumes, she might have succeeded, but the new fashion was an antidote to her sneers, though a little pony-chaise, containing Lady Harpendale and her two nieces, were all who arrived at the appointed hour.

I awaited them at the door, little Peter in my arms, and the three other children grouped around me.

My dress was a white damask, nearly up to the throat, tied with blue ribbons; the sleeves were short, but had deep frills to them, gathered up to the bend of the elbow with knots of blue ribbons. My dress had a train, which was looped up and passed through a pocket-hole, displaying a short-quilted petticoat of blue camlet. Blue ribbons tied back my curls, twisting in and out among them, and ending in a bow with long ends at one side. This is the dress in which I was painted a full-length portrait, and which is now to be seen at Mallerdean.

It was a very pleasant party. Every one was pleasant, though the fine ladies came very late. This was Lady Lanton's doing. After Lady Harpendale's arrival, the pony-chaise was sent back to bring others from Mallerdean. Meanwhile the Ritsons and Lady Joyce arrived. The Beauty was very fine. She had a parasol, then quite a new invention, and under the shadow of this she sat down on a bank, evidently thinking she looked like a wood nymph. The Rev. Mr. Beaume, the rector, came in their train.

She solemnly gazed at Beaume all the afternoon, and only brightened into animation when a plate of sugared cakes was put before her. Her sisters went round courting admiration for their Agnes. I began to be in despair at the non-appearance of my other guests, and despatched a dear little girl, a niece of Lady Joyce's, who was dressed in a little pink frock and white tippet and sleeves, to see what had detained them. The tea was becoming too strong, the cakes all cold, Arcadia and Erminia lowing to be milked.

However, they flocked in at last. Lady Lanton had contrived to detain them; they did not seem quite to understand how it had happened, but they were all pleased at their own appearance and at my preparations. Everything went off well, and we all enjoyed ourselves; they were amused at the curiosities, and we were laughing and talking, when at last my lady came in, brought by Peter, and obliged to be civil and smiling. The mania of malice and mischief was not, however, to be baulked—she played tricks for which a child would have been whipped.

I would not have believed it, had I not seen her. She began by

upsetting the great china bowl of cream; luckily, as she came last, there was not much in it. She dropped her own cup and saucer upon Lady Harpendale's lap, who goodnaturedly remarked, "How fortunate was the command that we were to come in cottage attire!" She placed her bread and butter so that Lord Oram sat down on it, for which, we knew, she got sent mentally to a hot place. Under pretence of getting her syllabub, she loosened Arcadia and Erminia from their tether, who began to prance about, in great delight at their unexpected liberty, creating great terror and confusion among the fine ladies. But they soon recovered when they saw how gentle and sweet-tempered were Erminia and Arcadia. They did no dishonour to their names, but came like pretty ladies to my call, responding to my caresses, and seeming glad to be tethered by my hands.

"Ah! Mrs. Mallerdean," said one of the gentlemen, in the high-flown language of the day, "no wonder that we worship you, it is but fitting we should, when even the brute creation obey your slightest call."

These were the compliments that provoked Lady Lanton to be so hard upon me.

Taken at their value they were scarce worth the time spent upon their utterance; and would not have dwelt upon the ear longer than the rustle of a dried leaf, but for their effect upon her.

The more inwardly enraged from the impossibility of utterance, she chafed and worried herself until her brain became disturbed.

In no other way can I account for a fearful act she attempted to perform the second party I had at Dulce Domum.

The day was unusually fine, with a sort of sunshine and balm in the air that was of itself delicious to feel and inhale.

The perfume of newly-mown hay was wafted in at every window, while from each could be seen that beautiful sight—a jocund and lively hay-field. The groups of people added so much to the picturesque beauty of the scene—some refreshing themselves under the shade of the great oak trees, others following the waggons, and twos and threes in various groups cocking up the hay with many a laugh and song.

Some of my fine visitors saw this sight, an English hay-field, now, for the first time; and such was their delight at the silvan beauty of the scene, that long after the last waggon had slowly passed from sight, when the liveliest and most lingering group of haymakers had departed home, they sat gazing still, and talking of their new sensations until the noon passed on to evening, the evening faded into twilight, and night was casting her shadows quickly over the quiet world.

Reluctantly we called for lights to prepare for returning home.

My newly-made cottagers had amused themselves earlier in the evening by putting my little Peter to sleep in one of the rooms, and his little cousin Billy in another. The children, worn out with play and excitement, must either have been sent home or allowed some



rest. The latter was decided upon; the evening being so soft and balmy, there was little fear of any harm occurring to them. So I ran upstairs to tell the nurses to prepare the little darlings for being carried home.

Rumm, Lady Lanton's nurse, went downstairs for a light, while mine passed on to an inner chamber for their shawls and wraps. I remained alone by my little Peter, half shrouded by the damask curtain of the bed. Suddenly I heard a quick rushing step—at once a light flashed full in the face of my boy, illuminating also the angry, passionate face of Lady Lanton—for a moment she paused, apparently astonished at the sight of the lovely sleeping child.

Her eyes had so strange a glare in them, it seemed almost as if they could see nothing beyond the child. She muttered something; the great waxen taper in her hand wavered as if she was trembling. As quickly as she had appeared she now turned, and passing into the other room, without a moment's pause, without a look on the bed where her own child lay sleeping, she held the taper to the curtains. Fortunately they were not inflammable. I came swiftly behind her, and blowing out the taper, left her to conjecture who had seen this strange, almost insane deed.

As we all walked home together, I was no longer the merry, happy cottage hostess—my mind had received a great shock. Peter, feeling that I shivered, for the darkness made him clasp me closely to his side, besought me to tell him—"Was I ill?—tired?—vexed? What ailed his darling, that she shuddered even in his arms? The sweetest, gayest creature, but a moment past, and now, why, still sweet as ever, but like a startled fawn, like a timid child—like——"

"Somebody a little cold," I interrupted.

"Is she cold, and nothing more?" he whispered again.

In truth, how could I tell Peter? Would he believe me? No! I would say nothing. But if she should try again? If my beloved cottage, my Dulce Domum should be destroyed—burnt down—should I repent not telling him?

I tried to say "No." My heart would not echo the word. I reasoned—what was the value of the cottage in comparison with the good name of Peter's sister? Not even the sweet and dearest name of Peter could sugar over the danger of losing it. It was to me so valuable in so many ways—to say nothing of the childish joy I had in such a possession. No baby with its newest toy, no boy with his first pet, no woman with her dearest wish fulfilled, no man with his happiest hobby gratified, ever felt more delight than I did in the possession of this little lovely cottage. It was sacred to me from the manner in which it was given. It was loved by me, because it was a sort of pledge. Its former associations blended themselves happily with mine, and I never entered its sliding doors without remembering the gentle wisdom and sweet piety of its first mistress. So once more I shuddered, and as I did so, exclaimed,

"Oh! no, no, I could not bear it!"

Then was Peter almost stern in commanding me to tell him my thoughts; so I confided to him thus much—

"That I loved Dulce Domum almost as much as I loved Peter!"

He protested he did not believe me, and in arguing the matter all the way home, I forgot to shiver, and he forgot that I had ever done so. Thus I told him nothing. What worse could have happened had I done so? For, oh! she succeeded. One evening, in September it was—almost my last party—we had agreed that the nights were too damp and chilly to repeat them with safety; and as I said so, we turned to look at the pretty place that made us all so happy, when, lo! each window shone with an illumination that made all cry out. All but me—I knew the hand, and turned in speechless passion to confront her.

Her eyes sparkled with triumph, her usually pale cheeks flushed with pleasure. Suddenly the flames, bursting out in every direction, illumined her face with its cruel exultation. It was too much for me. I sprang forward, with outstretched arms, as if to extinguish the fire. Peter caught me to his breast. "Oh! Peter," I sobbed, "I loved it!—loved it so!"

He was overcome with my grief, and regardless of the company, heedless of any comment, poured upon me the fondest, tenderest epithets.

"Your tears distract me, my life! my love! I only live to make you happy. My Dulce, calm those wild sobs; to-morrow, to-night, at once, I will rebuild your cottage. Dearest, sweetest wife, look up, smile once more. Give me but time, and you shall have another Dulce Domum, that will have no rival on earth!"

I was ashamed myself at my wild grief, and the little control I had over myself. But the sense of this, joined to Peter's love and goodness to me, brought my best cure. I could see how the gratification of every wish, the fulfilment of every whim, was beginning with subtle power to undermine all self-control. In lamenting over this, I could the more pity Lady Lanton, for the endeavour to pain me had recoiled on herself. She saw that all the world was as a grain of sand to Peter, weighed against his wife.

Conversation was very much more studied in those days than now. People really conversed. Our county was, at that time, agitated by a religious movement, and the responsibility that rested on all the upper ranks, all the squirearchy, masters, mistresses, any in authority, to promote education and religious training. Sunday schools were instituted, and, in great houses like Mallerdean, it was not unusual for the mistress to collect her younger servants, and instruct them in their religious duties.

Little as I had to do with the management of our house, I conceived that such duties were very becoming in me to perform, all

the more because I was a clergyman's daughter, and in some measure already used to it.

It was about this time that grandmamma came to pay me her first visit, accompanied by dear Sissy and Philip, also the beloved child Roland.

My boy had grown into a splendid fellow, now fourteen months old, able both to walk and talk. He had, so far, a great advantage in being with his cousins; and as for Buffy, he devoted himself to him as if he was his only and hired nurse. So that now, unlike the time of their christening, little Peter attracted all eyes and hearts, while Roland was only an uninteresting baby. He was still Sissy's idol, though I could not help suspecting a rival at hand.

Sissy paid me the compliment of saying she had been looking forward to paying me a visit in my own house with the greatest anticipation of happiness; and now that she really was at the summit of her wishes, she was delighted to be able to say she was not disappointed.

"And what a delightful creature is Lady Lanton!" (Poor dear Sissy!) "And Sir Brough! What an attached couple they seem!" (Poor good Sissy!)

Grandmamma was not so easily deceived as Sissy.

"My child," she said, "in giving you my dear Mr. Courtenaye's first gift to me, the gold chain, I fancied you deserved it, from showing signs of a sensitive, feeling heart, and I am not deceived. You know what a wife should be. But I find my old heart throb, all the tempers of hot youth rising once again, and a very bitter feeling of anger assail me, when I see that young woman so discreditable in her manner to you. I question if it is not the more proper thing that your husband should be told.

"I have reasoned with myself, grandmamma, sometimes fearing that a base submission warrants her dislike, but I find I can more easily bear her humours than the thought I was the cause of separating a brother and sister who loved each other well until I appeared. When the time comes for them to quarrel and part, it must be their own act and deed, and for a cause with which I have nothing to do."

"You are wise, Dulce; but, meanwhile, will that quarrel ever take place? She seems to me to assume an entirely different aspect the instant he enters."

"Let it take place or not, oh! grandmamma, I am so happy! Who is so blest as I am!"

"Dear child, you have, indeed, many, many blessings, not the least of which are the kind neighbours that surround you. I shall have so much to tell all your old friends."

How many questions had I to ask her about them—of all the dearest memories of those happy days!

Both Thomas and Hind accompanied grandmamma, and were

vastly amusing to me, because of the awe and ceremony with which they treated me.

I tried to remind Thomas of various scoldings he had given me. He turned a deaf ear, and would not be brought to allow anything but that I was a "dear Miss!" As for Hind, she curtsied at every word, and "my lady'd" me at every sentence.

Sissy, too, was not without her revulsion. The first day of her arrival she "oughted" me a little about my boy. But, when she saw him, she acknowledged at once he was a splendid fellow. Then, as was usual with her, she fussed about grandmamma, and all her little comforts. But there was nothing to be said when grandmamma was shewn into the room, her sofa placed as it was at home, her little table, a cup, saucer, and plate, almost the identical pattern of her own, the pot of fresh flowers, the soft foot-stool, and the hand-screen.

"How nice of her to recollect everything so well!" exclaimed that good Sissy, more delighted that this was the case than anything accruing to herself.

Finally, Sissy, in a couple of days, changed altogether, and, so far from offering me the best advice, was always asking for mine. Altogether she seemed inclined to put me in her position as elder sister.

"Do you know," said she when we were alone, "Philip says he does not half like Lady Lanton. I asked him his reason, and he answered that she scowled at little Roland. Now, that is all his nonsense."

"He is right so far. She does not care for babies, or much for her own children."

"Well, she is a very fine woman, and has, I dare say, been too grandly brought up. That's a very frightful boy who is always following you about."

"What! my dear Buffy! I assure you he is the dearest boy alive."

"I must say he is a polite little fellow, and took off his hat to Roland, as if he was as old as himself; and, I perceive, he is always at hand to do little civilities, which you don't expect in a rough boy."

"But he is not a rough boy. He is the gentlest, tenderest, wisest fellow of his age that was ever born, I think. He has the knack of doing just what you want, at the proper moment, and without being told."

"Still, he is an odd boy. I heard him tell his father to remember he was a gentleman. Sir Brough good-naturedly laughed instead of being angry."

"Oh! Buffy keeps us all in order. And as for his cleverness, he is quite a Solomon. His uncle can trust him with any order about the cottage."

"Ah! my dear Dulce," exclaimed the prudent Sissy, "do you mean to tell me that actually your husband is building so beautiful a cottage merely to be a sort of pleasure-house for you?"

"He gave it to me before, and it was greatly injured by a fire. Consequently he pulled it all down, and is rebuilding it after my fancy."

"It will cost a great deal of money, and all for a summer-house!"

"It is to be more than that. If my dear Sissy should ever want change of air, I shall have a lovely little cottage to offer her to live in. If Marblette and Hythe are driven home by this uproar of war, which is beginning to disturb the world, here is Dulce Domum at their service. This is the reason that Peter is sparing neither trouble nor expense it making it a little gem of a house; one that can never again be burnt down. The situation deserves it."

"That is true, it is lovely! Those terraces are quite unique, and the river so pretty—all fringed by woods."

"I am to have a boat and learn to row myself. Opposite to the cottage, just over the bank, lives that nice Lady Joyce; and through the wood the Ritsons' house is reached. They all regard that cottage with as much interest as if it were their own."

Then I showed grandmamma and Sissy the papers that I had found in the old cabinet, belonging to the Mrs. Mallerdean who lived eighty years before, and for whom the cottage was first built.

They both mourned with me that no record was kept of the contents of the five drawers.

"But," said grandmamma, "make amends by establishing a cabinet for yourselves."

This idea pleased Sissy and me. We began to recall our first childhood—all our pleasures, all our sayings, doings, wishes.

We wrote to Marblette to help us out with her memories, and the dear little thing answered back again that she hoped Sissy would not forget her tumble into the great bath, out of which papa rescued her; and that I would record a valiant battle with a mouse that approached too near to the baby's cradle. Dearest Marblette! we were glad she wrote in so lively a strain, for matters were but dreary on the Continent, and, far away from us still, she was expecting her confinement. But she had a brave spirit.

We were to have gone to her, but a sudden meeting of Parliament, and great internal troubles in the kingdom, caused all anxious and far-seeing men to rally round their sovereign.

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## CHAPTER XXX.

### DUTIES.



ORN was never known to be so dear, and there was not only no prospect of its being lower, but every fear that it would rise to a fabulous price.

The poor people resorted to many expedients to eke out their pittance of flour, even going so far as to mix sawdust with it.

Bread made of beans and peas-meal was commonly used in all houses, great and small.

As the best mode of keeping the people from starving in our neighbourhood, Peter did everything to promote work. It was thus that the cottage was built—absolutely, no stone was placed in it that did not do good. He employed not the best workpeople, but those most in need, watching their labour with great care himself, so that it should be well done.

He also was one of the first to promote draining ; and it was owing to him that so good and valuable a canal was made at that time, enriching the town of Mallerdean to a great extent.

I, for my part, was not willing to be behindhand. With perseverance and energy, I got together some women's and children's schools, wherein they were taught, not so much to read and write, as to cook, and sew, and learn to make the most out of a little.

It is almost impossible to believe the dull stupidity that one encountered among the agricultural peasantry of those days. But little better than savages, nothing but sheer hunger seemed to make an impression upon them. The most childish superstitions, the silliest customs, the most inconvenient and absurd habits, seemed to descend from parent to child with as much certainty as their names. There were very few among them that had that self-respect which desired to be better. Lumpish and stolid, they felt grateful for a bit of bread, but loathed the trouble of having to work for it.

It required a nature as ardent and eager as mine, with a judgment and wisdom such as Peter's, to carry on so thankless a work. By degrees we broke through the adamant wall of stupid supineness, and laid the foundation of a wish for better things. Among the mothers we made use of that instinct which they held in common with the brutes—of love for their children.

Catching hold one day of two or three little straggling children, that were pretty in spite of their dirt, I had them nicely washed and neatly dressed, and sent them out so fresh, so smiling, and so happy, that they soon had an admiring crowd about them.

Shortly the school-house door was besieged by eager mothers, wanting their children to be equally transformed. By degrees grew the shame in the mothers of not being fit themselves to touch or kiss their pretty clean children ; and it was to them like the awakening into a new world, the first perception of self-respect.

Let a mind be ever so dull, there is a beauty in the practice of order that irresistibly attracts. There is an innate pleasure in tidiness and cleanliness that enhances the benefit of each. They bring their own reward with them. Added to these, there is a sort of emulation that does more good than all besides. It is a healthy principle that moves the most sluggish natures not to be left behind. It is needless to say we had no Utopian success, but, the machinery being set in motion, we patiently abided the fruits of its work.

After this came business I did not like so much. For the second time I was to go through the ordeal of a London season.

Sir Brough had a serious illness, which made me fancy (I may say hope) that Lady Lanton would remain behind in the country with him. But she had no intention of doing so.

Buffy was left to entertain his father, and a physician stayed at Mallderdean to attend to his recovery. My little Peter and his nurse, with the two Lanton boys and their nurses, went for change of air to a large old rambling manor-house by the sea-side, in a neighbouring county, where Peter had some property. This house was now used by a farmer, and in those days it was considered healthy for children to go to farm-houses, and inhale the sweet breath of the cows, and to run about wild among all the sheep and poultry, living upon rich milk, curds, and barley-bread.

It seemed to me, on this my second visit to London, as if it was still more disagreeable than before.

Being a matron now of some standing, though still under age, I went about in a manner more independent of Lady Lanton than before. Not popular in the country, she was still less regarded in town. To make any sensation, one required to be a beauty—a wit—or something wicked. I was set up as a beauty at once, and raved after, as is the fashion of those who have nothing to think about. I was praised by a distinguished judge of beauty, made the fashion, and “toasted” accordingly.

In addition to this, I was credited with a great deal of wit. It was enough to be a beauty, without taking the trouble either to think or speak. I was the fashion, as I have said, and could do no wrong for the moment, as I was accredited with beauty and wit. It now only remained for me to be wicked, to attain the zenith of a town fame. When I look about me now, and see the change that has come over society, I am thankful. No one now can judge of the state of things sixty years ago. The middle class, in which I had been educated, were without extraordinary vice, as they were without much shining virtue; and until now I had no perception of the unblushing profligacy of the higher classes.

Once enter the giddy vortex of pleasure and you were spun round in it, until all sense of right and wrong gave place to a recklessness that stopped at nothing. The finest gentleman said things to the greatest ladies that we should blush now even to think of; and they were considered wits! To be commended by a person who was notoriously profligate, was more in your favour than the display of an heroic virtue. To create a piece of scandal was to oblige the town infinitely, giving it something to talk of, no matter if a soul was lost for ever.

Joined to all this vice, this frivolity, this coarseness and bad taste, was an under-current of patriotism and strong national sense, that now and then floated to the surface—charming some to a worthier

and higher destiny—but so mauled and pulled about by others as to thicken their muddy stream of life with a deeper stain.

The example of one Court was pitted against the other. The dulness, the prudery, the ceremony, the stagnation of the one was as unbearable as the noise, the gambling, rioting, and ill-breeding of the other.

To one or other of these parties the town inclined—there was no medium.

No wonder that England was visited in those days with calamitous wars, with fears of famine, with rumours of riots, with discontent from the beginning to the uttermost end of the kingdom !

No wonder, then, that good men feared, and strong men wavered, and that society rushed along more madly than ever, as if to escape thought !

My husband was among those who mourned sadly for these evil times.

When grieved for the pale cheeks and languid step that this dismal life entailed on me, he would say,

“Oh ! that we were at *Dulce Domum*, and that I might taste the sweets of Eden, apart from all this riot and vexation ! But I must do my country’s work.”

And he was right. The true patriots of England could alone save her.

When I thought of that election time—of the trouble we took, the abuse we bore, the insults we received, the wrong, the vexation, the time, the money, all spent to gain a seat in Parliament—I felt how pure ought to be the patriot’s heart, how grateful those who elected him. And yet is either the case in half the elections in Great Britain ?

It was our custom sixty years ago to use sedan chairs instead of coaches. Every great house had its porters, whose duty was to carry the chairs and their occupants. Now-a-days, when one can call a cab, chairs are useless ; but with us they were a luxury.

Now and then there was a cry (as there always will be, in every age, about something) upon the enormity of the sin, making our fellow-mortals beasts of burden. But chairs being a necessary article, no attention was seriously given to the remonstrance.

We not only had our chairs, but vast sums of money were spent upon them, and the liveries of the porters exceeded all others in richness and quality.

That I might divert myself as much as possible, Peter ordered for me a new chair ; leaving for Lady Lanton the one she had hitherto used.

Mine was a remarkably handsome chair, made after a new invention lately brought in. It was partially made of cane, over which was stretched a fine varnished leather. It was edged round the top with a silver border ; the handles of the doors and windows, as well as the



tips of the porters' poles, were all of silver too. Inside it was wadded and lined with pale blue satin, and the curtains of a rich lace were tied back with cords of pale blue silk, fastened with hooks of silver.

I was childishly pleased with my new chair ; it was so light, as well as lovely, that the porters seemed not to care how far they carried me.

Lady Lanton borrowed it of me a few days after it came home, and kept it out too late for me to use that day. She borrowed it a second day ; she took it a third time without leave. On a fourth occasion I found she had lent it to the Countess Harmann.

I bethought me how I should act. According to the rule I had laid down, never to complain to Peter of Lady Lanton, I could not do so now ; all the more because of late he had been worried, and was evidently ill at ease about some other cause.

I decided to go early in my chair to consult Lady Oram.

I own to sitting with a high nose and disdainful air on the cushions so lately sat on by the Countess Harmann. In a word, I looked upon the blue quilting of my chair, and its pretty lace curtains, as contaminated by her touch. So high does one get in one's notions when the tide sets that way.

Lady Oram was delightfully indignant, and was for going out of hand to tell Peter the whole.

Moved by my persuasions, she at last brought Lord Oram into the conclave.

Having expended a little breath upon his favourite expletives, he at last said,

"Egad ! I have it ! Peter shall find it out himself, I am d—— if he shan't ! Leave it to me. The next time Lady Lanton is in your chair, if Peter does not see her seated therein, may I be ——"

Being accustomed to his phraseology, I heard him condemn himself to this sad fate without compunction. But I almost felt inclined to join him, when we discovered that my chair was gone from his door, and the old one in its place.

Lord Oram, silent from an overplus of indignation, handed me in, and then, ordering his own chair, started off to fulfil his intention.

I was sitting reading at home, when Lady Oram, rushed in exclaiming,

"Oh ! my dear child, you have escaped such a villainous plot ! My lord has discovered the whole thing, and you must, you really must, give him permission to tell Peter. What use do you think Lady Lanton and the Countess have made of your chair ? They have taken it, regardless of their own characters (though the one need no longer trouble herself about hers), into all the vile parts of Lunnon, where nothing reputable is ever seen. So conspicuous as it is for its beauty and fashion, and for its porters' liveries, they have paraded it up and down in every bad quarter of the town."

"Why should they do so ?"

"Don't you perceive, my dear, the reason ? No woman of any

reputation would be seen in those parts. Your name is up now in every club as being the most innocent young baggage ever born. Fortunately you carry your goodness in your face, and so the world is charitable enough to put your impudence down to ignorance. My lord has been posting about the town, saving your name at the expense of Lady Lanton's, which is no more than she deserves. If she will touch pitch, of course she will get smudged. Now you must let me tell Peter. Another such escapade, and we shall have you forbidden court."

"Don't tell Peter. Her offence is such he will never forgive his sister. To injure me in any way he will resent to the very day of his death."

"I believe you are right ; those Mallerdeans have strange tempers. My lord could not show Peter his sister in the chair, because the curtains were all drawn, and for aught he knew her poodle might be in it. But he spoke to the porters, and demanded, in loud and violent terms, how they dared leave his door without their mistress. He would take care they should be turned away for their impudence. They both looked pale and frightened ; but they ran on with the chair as if all the dogs in the town were at their heels, and made him no reply."

"I think I will send the chair back to the coachmaker's for a time, under pretence of some alteration."

I was ashamed to tell Lady Oram of my disgust at sitting in it after the Countess Harmann, who, in truth, had left a very strong odour in it of musk or other heavy scent. I had a mind to have it purified before I used it again.

"She will only torment you in some other way, Dulce. Let her be exposed at once to her brother."

"It will come soon enough, but I have not borne her temper so long to be the scape-goat at last. They must separate from a cause that has only to do with themselves."

"Why do you think it will be soon ?"

"Because there is a change in Peter's manner towards her. He has answered her once or twice abruptly, and his face has a sternness in it I have not seen before."

"If that is the case I will quiet my lord. It is hard if you are to lose the fruit of your long forbearance."

Kissing her gratefully, I went home, from whence I ordered the chair to the maker's, with a request that he would purify it from the scent, or put in a new lining.

About this time Peter was offered a baronetcy by Mr. Pitt, but he did not accept it, concluding the doing so might be construed into a pledge. When we first came up to town, Peter had made it a particular request to his sister that the Countess Harmann should not be admitted into our house.

"I have no desire to interfere with your friendship," he remarked, "but as regards my wife, she is neither to visit nor receive her—therefore she must not come here."

Now I knew that the Countess had been admitted to Lady Lanton several times. On one of these occasions, Peter came home earlier than usual. I saw a heavier gloom upon his brow than I had ever seen before. He sent for Lady Lanton, and they were closeted together for nearly two hours. At the end of that time, he came to me, and said :

"Dulce, I have ordered the chariot, and beg you will have some clothes packed up, as I have a desire to leave town for a few days."

When I returned to the drawing-room with my mantle and hat on, ready to start, I found Peter waiting for me. I was puzzled as to whether I should ask permission to take leave of Lady Lanton or not. I was the more earnest not to be wanting in little civilities to her now that I perceived her to be in disgrace with her brother.

He did not give me time either to ask or think more about it, for he took my hand, and led me down to the carriage at once.

## CHAPTER XXXI.

### A CONJUGAL QUARREL.



**S**ATISFIED to be near him, still more to have him all to myself, I was supremely content, and neither inquired where we were going, nor why we departed so suddenly. Like a child I could not prevent my happiness breathing forth in sparkling eyes and involuntary smiles.

Peter caught one of these ; and, as if pleased at it, he snatched my hand in his, and said :

"Ah, Dulce, when a man has had a heavy mental blow, it is to a nature like yours he comes for consolation and serenity. And yet have you grieved me."

"How, Peter?" I asked, with a confidence that was born of the certainty that I had done nothing wilfully to vex him.

"You have submitted to treatment from my sister which no hound in my kennel would have borne. For once, my Dulce, I think your usually fine understanding has been at fault."

"It was understood between Lady Lanton and me long ago that I would suffer no insult to be offered to Mrs. Mallerdean ; but your wife could easily pardon the humours of her husband's sister, when they only affected her in private."

"You cannot excuse yourself, Dulce. You must have known and felt that, sooner or later, such bitter, extraordinary, unnatural hatred would break forth."

"Yet it is not for me that you have now quarreled with your sister?"

"No, you are right. You will not care to hear, as I shall not like

to tell, all that has passed between me and the sister I loved and esteemed ; but this much you shall know, I have been receiving letters from Buffy lately, regarding his father, that made me uneasy. The physician chosen by my sister, and left behind in charge of Sir Brough, proves to have been wholly unworthy of the responsibility. Buffy wrote at first to his mother, and finding how little regard she paid to his letters, with all their wretched details, he at last wrote to me. There is, as you know, a certain degree of sensitiveness between my sister and me, that deters either of us from being perfectly frank. We have been accustomed to imply disagreeables, but never to discuss them. Acting up to this habit, I inclosed Buffy's letters to me in an envelope, and sent them to her room. I concluded that she would make arrangements for going down to Mallerdean immediately. But day after day passed, and not only did she not speak to me upon the subject of the letters, but I saw no preparations made for her departure. Another letter from Buffy induced me to write to her, requesting her either to go home, or let me do so. I received an enigmatical reply, saying that her love for me, and her devotion to the name of Mallerdean, caused her to regard no other duty, and think of no other ties. The receipt of this letter, I own, shocked me. I derived no sort of pleasure from an affection that outraged all the holiest feelings of wife and mother in its display. As my eyes gradually opened to the strangeness of my sister's conduct, I became aware that this presumed love for me did not suffice to make her observe my wishes. The Countess Harmann has been constantly to this house, at all hours. She has even been into my private rooms. Do not suppose I had spies on her—no, she revealed herself—that habit of using musk betrays her wherever she goes. I felt that the time was come for me to speak seriously to my sister. Something told me we should quarrel, and I put off the evil day, out of a lingering tenderness for her. But to-day I have a letter from Buffy, saying it is now more than a week since he wrote to his mother, saying that his father had had a fit, which I infer is a paralytic stroke, as he has lost the use of his side. There is no immediate danger of death, but that he will ever recover seems impossible. I sent for my sister. I could not prevent a certain anger displaying itself in my manner. It seemed to throw her off her guard. We have parted, to meet no more for, I hope, a lengthened period. I cannot see her again—no, not again ! not again !”

As Peter repeated these words, in tones of anger and disgust, I saw he shuddered.

“Ah !” thought I to myself, “what strong feelings these Mallerdeans have ! I shall have the more to excuse Lady Lanton, because they only know how to love and hate. She has outraged Peter's feelings as a husband, and he will never forgive her. His pride, too, is hurt, through me ; and even in this moment, that I feel I have got rid of her for ever, he is more angry with me than he has ever been. In what way shall I deprecate it ? How am I to act the penitent, and

sue for pardon, while I feel myself the victim rather than the criminal? Throw myself into his arms, and weep upon his breast? No, my spirit rebels against the thought. I have not borne so much to be included in the crash and calamity of their quarrel. She has dragged my name in merely to stab him where most vulnerable. A quarrel was inevitable—the right was on his side—she had nothing left to fight with but malice and untruth. If he could not separate my name from them, it was his misfortune, not my fault.”

And yet how I loved him! How I longed to lay my head on his shoulder, prisoning his two great hands in mine, and making him listen to all the wife-like conceits in my brain.

He was proud—his mind revolted against the thought that his wife, Mrs. Mallerdean of Mallerdean, had suffered indignities without resenting them, though these indignities were poured on her by his own sister.

I was proud also—my mind revolted against the thought that they had both forgotten the real cause of their quarrel, and meant to make me their scape-goat.

And yet Peter looked—for I took a sidelong glance at him now and then—as if he wanted to be kissed and entreated. I felt relenting very fast, until I fortunately recollected that it was as well that he should see I could be as haughty and proud as any Mallerdean among them.

If I had succumbed to his sister in a manner that shocked him, he should see I would do it to no other person, not even himself.

So I continued knotting in silence. In those days we ladies thought every moment wasted which found us without knotting. There is a fashion in everything, but there was also a vanity in knotting. It displayed the hands, and gave the knotters an opportunity of exhibiting grace and industry at the same time. No matter in what company, in any position, at all hours, in a carriage, under a tree, at a ball, listening to music, every lady knotted. To produce your knotting out of your pocket was as natural as saying “how do you do?” The little machine used was made from the most ordinary materials, up to those studded with jewels, and composed of precious metal. It was a gift more ordinarily presented than any other, and there was as much coquetry in the use of it as in the fan.

When persons have an occupation, they can better bear the interminable nuisance of suspense. Thanks to my knotting, Peter was the first to break silence.

“Dulce, cease that never-ending knotting, and listen to me.”

Instantly I popped the obnoxious work into my pocket, and stretched out both hands to meet his.

“Child,” said he, gently, “you know I am angered with you.”

“Then for once my Peter is unjust.”

“Nay, Dulce, I am in earnest.”

“So am I.”

"Your eyes flash—is it possible you can be angry?"

"Yes, it is. Why do you drag me into this quarrel with your sister?"

"But, Dulce, she detailed scenes she had had with you—words, blows—good heavens! her tales exceeded all bounds!"

"She did that to tease you—why infer that I submitted? I am proud as well as you and Lady Lanton."

"Are you so?" he replied, his luminous beautiful smile just hovering over his mouth.

"Yes. I will not have it said that the estrangement between you and your sister was caused by me. She is unnatural in her conduct to her husband and children—you grieve over that; she has a person to visit her whom you have forbidden your house—you resent this. Upon remonstrating with her on these two subjects, she forgets herself, and having no other weapon with which to defend herself, she uses the name of your wife. If I had been Peter Mallerdean, I should have smiled in a sort of contempt."

"Dulce, my anger was for you. She said——"

"Ah! that is what I never mean to hear; my pride is too great. But still I should like to know one thing.

"What is it, dearest one?"

"Well, I should like to know where we are going?"

Upon hearing this question, accompanied by a look that was meant to beguile him, or bewitch him, Peter no longer resisted the impulse to be restored to a natural way of thinking. He laughed, and gently replied,

"You are going off to prison."

Thus ended our first and last quarrel—no very mighty one; but I gained the day, which makes the remembrance of it pleasant.

We went to Brighton, and I used all the arts I professed to make Peter forget his melancholy. We had to return to town all too soon. A court-ball was impending, and Peter was for once rather anxious about my dress and appearance.

He was engaged that night rather late at the House of Commons, but had bid me dress and go early. I was to wait for him in the lobby, so that we might enter the presence together.

I was in joyous spirits. My dress pleased me well, and I diverted myself with thinking how delighted Peter would be when, throwing off my cloak, I should show myself to him, adorned with perfect art. That elasticity of spirit which rose upon the least occasion floated me off into a mood as happy and rapturous as a child's. Though I did not allow it to myself, our house had to me an aspect of home and sunshine, now that Lady Lanton was out of it. Ensconced behind the pedestal of a statue in the lobby, I watched the gay company thronging in, and never felt more gay.

On a sudden I perceived Lady Lanton herself approaching, and with her the Countess Harmann. To my astonishment, the latter seemed dressed in the fac-simile of my dress. What first struck me was the

coronai of plumes, that were arranged according to a fancy of my own, in a sort of sweeping circle, that descended low on one side of the neck. A little circlet of diamonds was the only other ornament on my head. The Countess had precisely the same. I immediately scanned her dress. It was the exact copy of mine—white crape looped up with water-lilies, showing a white satin petticoat, embroidered in silver and Roman pearls. They did not perceive me as they passed in earnest conversation.

"Yes, I brought him to town for the best advice," Lady Lanton was saying; "it is the only thing I could do, but I took care to leave the children at Mallerdean."

Ah, my dear Buffy, I was pleased at that—it went to my heart to think that the result of all these quarellings might be that I should be separated from you.

This was my first thought. The second followed quickly. Peter would never forgive the public exhibition of his wife and Lady Harmann appearing so exactly dressed alike as to be remarkable.

Elated as I was with my new dress, my appearance in it, and the sensation I hoped to make, it was all over now. I must ask for a chair, and get home as speedily as I could, that I might reach it before Peter left it. Fortunately I was in time.

When I told my tale, he was astonished; and had the ball not been a royal one, we should certainly not have attended it. But there was no alternative, Peter had but a minute to admire my dress, when I had to run and change it. I think he felt the disappointment even more than I did, it was so becoming. I now put on a dress of blue gauze, which was perfectly new, but wanted the grace and delicacy of the other. I exchanged my coronal of feathers for one long one tipped with blue, which I fastened on to my head, with the band of diamonds passing over and over it.

In less than an hour I was again in the lobby, accompanied by my husband, and we passed into the ball-room.

On its very threshold were Lady Lanton and the Countess. It seemed as if they meant to join us, as we passed on our way to the royal circle, but they were so confused at the unexpected change in my dress, or the utter disregard Peter paid to their presence, that they allowed some people to intervene between us, and we were soon lost in the crowd that crushed on to the Presence Chamber. Having made our obeisance, we joined the Orams, and one or two people whom we knew, with whom we went into an inner room, where a limited number of people were dancing. Here we agreed to stay, as we were a select party, and mostly known to each other. And here I had the great happiness, as it seemed to me, of dancing for the first and only time in my life with Peter.

To a youthful animated spirit, dancing is like the embodiment of the joy of the mind, and when you may freely abandon yourself to the intoxication of it, because your husband is your partner, nothing can

be more perfect. Thus, within a short space of time, I had experienced as many different feelings as there are clouds in an April day.

On the morrow, Peter wrote a letter to the Countess Harmann, which I suppose warned her—or threatened her. At all events, she disappeared from town—into the gaieties of which she had plunged far too soon after her husband's death, for her reputation. Shortly I learnt, from some chance source, that she, with the Lantons, were gone to try some mineral baths for the benefit of Sir Brough.

So when Peter and I went home, I had not a sorrow in my heart, but that we had been unable, through the troubled state of the Continent, to go and see Marblette. I took possession of Lady Lanton's three boys, and we made arrangements for Buffy to go to Eton before very long.

Now indeed I felt myself Queen of the County. I had gained confidence and dignity—which might be partly owing to mixing so much in London society, where one had to assume a character for stateliness and wisdom, whether real or not, in order to ride above the dross of society—and partly because I was elated and satisfied with myself.

I was now Peter's confidential adviser. He even employed me to copy out and revise his public papers; he consulted me in the management of his estates; he joined me in every duty connected with his position, and nothing occurred to him in which I did not share.

He detailed to me all the particulars of a new will he had made, and wished me to read it, and suggest alterations; but no one can blame me for utterly shrinking from such a duty. I again told him that I could not survive him; and even if I was that most deplorable thing on earth—a widow, I was satisfied he would do more for me than my wildest wishes could desire. Finally, seeing how the mention of the future unhinged me, he forbore saying anything further than that it was all signed and sealed, and his mind easy.

We had a great round of visiting this autumn, and I took upon me the patronage and duties belonging to the Queen of the County. These were more pleasant than arduous; nevertheless they required a certain judgment, which Lady Harpendale was pleased to say I exercised in a manner that excited her admiration.

Lady Joyce and the Ritsons joined eagerly in all benevolent plans. Even the Beauty had been seen to exert herself in making small garments for pauper babies.

As for mine especial hobby, Dulce Domum, Buffy and I were almost mad about its beauty, and never thought it was over-praised.

I had written to offer it to Hythe and Marblette, as we were all in anxiety about their fate. But Hythe was too independent to leave his work and live in idleness—and indeed Marblette encouraged him. They were, for honour, earnestness, and unselfishness, matchless. It may well be believed that I liked nothing in which I did not endeavour to make my Marblette participate. I never lost an opportunity of forwarding her parcels, containing all sorts of things likely to be use-



ful ; and she, knowing my delight to do so, frankly responded by asking for what she most wanted. They had now moved to Nuremberg, where Hythe, as the safest plan, had purchased a small estate, which he got vastly reasonable. Even supposing that war should be declared, and his appointment be cancelled, he could live there on the proceeds of his land, in much greater luxury, with half the amount, than in England. Besides, he would not be losing his time, but would be enabled to perfect himself in the modern languages of Europe.

So the days glided by quickly, and the time was approaching when Peter hoped to have—the only wish left in his heart—a little daughter, the image of her mother.

Peter suggested that my parents should pay us a visit ; he wrote himself, begging them to come at once. They came, my father and mother, bringing with them the Miss Emmy and Effie of former days—now joyously anxious, without nurse's leave, to recognise Peter in any capacity he chose to name. They were wild with delight at all the pleasures prepared for them, and had only one drawback to their delight, of which they kept gravely reminding each other.

"It must all come to an end, you know."

About this time Peter received a letter from Lady Lanton, requesting, in terms humble for her, that she might pay us a short visit before I was laid up.

Her youngest children had joined her some time ago, but Buffy lived wholly with us—that is, when not at school. We understood Sir Brough to be well in health, but helpless and almost witless.

She desired, she said, to examine her papers, and to remove some of her own property, which was in the rooms she had used, and which we had locked up, and not opened since her departure.

Peter's face wore a sort of ominous gloom on it, after receiving the letter. It seems he asked my father's advice, who not only recommended him to accede to her request, but meet her as if no quarrel had separated them. But the blood of the Mallerdeans revolted at this. He compromised in this way. She must postpone her coming until I had recovered my confinement, and gone to the sea for change of air. Then she should have the use of Mallerdean for a month, which would give her ample opportunity to do all the business she required.

"I will never again allow her to sleep under the same roof as my wife," said Peter, haughtily.

The next day, before Peter's letter could have reached her, a messenger came in advance, to say she was so far on her route to us as to be changing horses at the town of Mallerdean, and would be with us in an hour.

Peter ordered a horse immediately. He went to put on his riding-dress. I followed him everywhere, as a spaniel follows his master, with wistful, loving eyes. At last they obtained an answer to the question they so mutely asked.

"My darling, for your sake, and yours only, I will curb my Mallerdean temper. I will see my sister ; I promise you to be kind and

thoughtful for her. In everything I will study her wishes, except in coming to sleep under the same roof where you are. God forbid that I should show so little sense of the boundless gifts with which He has crowned my life, if I cannot show mercy and pity to a fellow-mortal and a sister! Kiss me, love—again, again! Every kiss you give me will purify my lips from all harsh and angry words. I hate to leave you!”


Why did you, Peter? Where was nurse Alexander? We went down, all of us, to see him go.

Papa, mamma, little Peter clinging to my dress, Buffy at my right hand, Emmy, Effie. He mounted, he turned to give me a last smile—it was a smile of love ineffable, of happiness radiant; it was a divine smile!

Somebody said it rained. Who said it rained? An officious servant (they loved him so) ran for an umbrella. He unfurled it; the horse reared—again—I sprang down—I heard a sound as if a human head was shattered against the old, moss-covered stones of the old, time-honoured Tower. I was under the horse for a moment, but I sprang up with incredible strength; I caught him in my arms—not again should those remorseless stones give forth that dead, horrible sound of a battle between them and human life. The horse galloped riderless away. I know a carriage drove up; I saw Lady Lanton’s face looking out of it. Had God forgotten me?

## CHAPTER XXXII.

### SORROW.

“ His mercy clean gone for ever? Hath God forgotten to be gracious?”

“My son, give me thine heart!”

My heart! that was nothing! My life—my strength—my all—take all—what I lived for was dead—taken from me—I was bereft!

“My God! my God! why hast thou forsaken me?” “Who will show me any good?”

“One” died, a Holy One, a Great One, the Son of God. He died a shameful death on the cross “that we might be saved!” Die! how easy to die—gracious God!—am I mad? Any death—a thousand deaths—nay, nay—there is an unknown sin—never to be pardoned—but I could bear—what!—anything but this! this, that he should be lying dead, and I left to live on!

If it had not rained,—if he, that servant, had not opened the umbrella—if no messenger had come—if his sister had—oh! the chaos of my mind!—what wickedness was I thinking! I must be good, if I am to see him again! “In all this Job sinned not with his

lips, nor charged God foolishly!" What was Job to me? Nothing. He had not lost what I had lost. In a mute but an agonised passion of despair, the lessons and words of Scripture came floating on my mind—mixing themselves up with the torturing "ifs" that mocked me with a mad hope. If the servant had not opened the umbrella!—if his sister had only died!—any how, long ago!—if I had detained him a minute! Where was Nurse Alexander? Why had she not told me it was him, my husband, my beloved, my all, that I was to see shattered at my feet? Then I could have warned him; I would have held him; he would have been here now, bending over me, and, instead, I was now enduring an anguish of heart that made me heedless of bodily pangs.

"He was a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief!"

Grief! mine could not be expressed by grief. It was torture!—it was madness!—it was unendurable! If he had been a yard—a few inches farther advanced on his journey, not under the archway! If we had not gone down, perhaps he would have ridden hastily away, nor turned to give me that smile. If the servant had not opened the umbrella!

This "if" burnt itself into my brain. His life to be lost—his life—so precious—so invaluable—a life unparagoned, perfect—a masterpiece—lost by simply opening an umbrella! Ha! ha! Was that a laugh, or a dismal wailing groan?—a sound out of a very hell? Stay, let me think! Let me cling to God, let me remember to have a decency in my woe! Is Peter Mallerdean to be mourned for with the ravings of a maniac? I will be calm.

Why did his sister come? Why did it rain? Why did the servant open—again that phrase, insidiously creeping up, without its "if." Had I committed any crime? Had I rejoiced his sister was banished, and I throned in her stead?

"Whose sorrow was like unto my sorrow!"

My God, my God, pardon me! My reason is astray. I would not be blasphemous, but there is that sound in my ear. Will it ever leave it? And the sight in my eyes—will it ever go? I heard the sound of a cruel stone battling with a human skull! I saw the soul of a healthful, vigorous, perfect frame thrust out in a moment, at a breath, by just—merely—nothing more than the opening—no, I will not say it—it mocks me!

His sister, his cruel, unfeeling, unwomanly, odious—I would call her odious, she was his sister no longer—she did it. Why did she come? She was as a scourge to me!—a canker! I had driven her out of my thoughts, as one apart from me, as one who was a bygone bugbear. Once a trouble, then a nothing, and now a Gorgon, a Medusa, a monster! Was she sorry, I wonder? Her only brother, a Mallerdean! the only being, she had said, she ever loved! If she was grieved, was her woe like mine? "Ah! whose sorrow was like unto my sorrow?" What did they say?—how did they act?—what did people do when

they became that doleful, miserable, remediless, shivered, shattered thing, a widow? Oh! dreadful word—oh! ruthless, lamentable name! Yet so solemn, so deeply, profoundly, so heart-brokenly sacred.

"Peter, Peter, come to me! Oh! Peter, I am no widow—not yours!—not yours! Why—why did they say it rained? Why did he open——"

There was a voice—some one said—(it sounded like papa's voice. Perhaps this is only a frightful nightmare. I am again a little child—I am at home. We are going to read the Psalms and Lessons to papa. Oh! what a relief! I thought in another minute I was to be a mad woman).

What did that voice say?

"Dulce, it is Ascension Day, shall I read you the prayers of the Church?"

"If you please, papa," I answered in my child's voice; and clasping my hands together as I had seen my son—my son!—could I be still a child, and have a son? What a strange mad dream!

I would listen devoutly; God might, perhaps, look down, and see me, and pity me. Pity me!—oh! what could pity do!—restore the dead? But I must listen; for again those dreadful "ifs," again that strange medley of God's words: was it blasphemy rivalling my woe with all other woes—even that of the Son of God?

"Whoso doeth these things shall never fall." Oh! my God! "A crown of Life!"—ay, in good time—in hoary old age, when His work was done. But now—why now? Truly I was in the "fiery oven of God's wrath!" Oh! that I might be annihilated, that I might cease to be—that I was nothing, scorched out of all life, all feeling, as insensible as that stone! Oh! if to-day was but yesterday!—if he had lingered!—if he had hastened!—if the servant had not opened—

"They shall lay hands upon the sick, and they shall recover." And the dead also? Where was He who said, "Lazarus, come forth"? Oh! my Saviour—thou didst weep; look on me—is this Thine answer?

"Knowest thou that the Lord will take away thy master from thy head to-day?" What a cry!—who uttered it?

"She must be taken to bed," said a voice. The lips that uttered these words belonged to my mother, but it was the voice of Calamity itself.

My father ceased reading; he turned. He looked at me; he uttered a smothered cry of anguish, and hastily left the room. Agony of body restored my reason. I half smiled as I said to my mother,

"Are not the gates of Heaven always open on Ascension Day, mamma?" What a voice I spoke in!

"It has been so said, love; but to the good they are always open."

"Our Lord went to Heaven to-day! It is a blessed one to die on. Let me die in the next room."

"It would not be seemly, my child," she answered, gently; "the repose of the dead should not be disturbed by the cries of the living."

"But do not shut him out of my sight!"

"There are some duties to be performed. When your travail is over, I will open the door, and it shall not be closed again."

How good they were to me—my father and mother! His little daughter was born. One side of her face was crushed in as by a horse's foot. She lived an hour, and was baptised.

"Lay her in his arms," I said. Then I stayed quiet, waiting for death to come for me. Gentle, sweet thoughts stole to my soul. I asked God to pardon me for the wicked frenzy—the raving whirlwind of maddening grief that, for a time, annihilated reason.

"But," I said, "who of woman that was ever born had to endure what I had done that day?—who has lost what I have lost? What is there on earth to bear more? It is sufficient! Thou, God, knowest how much human nature can bear, and that this—this is too much! Take me home—let me join him! I cannot live without him!"

And a sudden sense of the utter desolation—the pitiableness of my position, should it so chance that my insensible heart did not break—that my healthy frame would not die, opened the womanly spring of tears; and I wept until I fainted.

When I was conscious again, it appeared to be deep in the night. My father and mother sat watching by a low fire. I felt in the bed for Marblette, thinking for the moment, "Oh! Bell! poor Bell!"

But papa ought to be reading; now he seems suddenly smitten with a fearful sorrow. By slow degrees the aching agony came again into my heart; again I tortured myself with a sort of mad effort to alter the inexorable fact, by those ever-recurring "ifs." I had just approached that one so scorched into my brain, when I heard my father say,

"Is she injured for life?"

"Tis impossible to say yet."

"We must pray God to take her, if it seems best to His wisdom."

"It is not as if her nature was the ordinary one—evanescent, and soon consoled. She is stricken for life. I would rather part with her than see her live and be miserable."

"This is a strange story of Lady Lanton's, that, in the Mallerdean family, father and son are never both alive for three years together."

"I do not believe it. Such superstition is unworthy the age in which we live."

"I agree with you. I rather put the observation down to her wish to disguise the little real feeling she possesses. She was prepared, she said, for some catastrophe."

"This ill accords with her orders to have the horse shot, the servant turned away, and the tower razed from the ground."

"I still think all this is meant to conceal the want of feeling, rather than an excess."

"I will not have Peter's tower pulled down—he loved it!"

My father and mother ran to me, as I said these words.

"Pray, father, pray to God to take me—I must be mad else!"

"God has afflicted you with so great a trial, Dulce, it beseems you to meet it with an entire abandonment to His will."

"Yes, papa," I answered, as I answered him long ago. "But I am to die—oh! let me die."

"You are greatly injured. Whether you live or die, it is in no human power to tell."

"I am to die," I kept murmuring, and I lay calmly waiting for death—my mind cleared—my brain reasserting its powers.

"Is the door open?"

"Yes, dear one—it shall not be closed again until you wish it."

"Is that a coffin?"

"Yes, Dulce—he you loved so well is now laid in his last home. His little Dulce is in his arms."

"I want to see them."

"My dear, it is impossible."

The voice that had from earliest childhood calmed and regulated our first waywardnesses seemed to have the same power now.

"Mother," I said, "if you come and lie by my side, I think I shall sleep; send my father to take some rest."

After a little whispering between themselves, they obeyed. In a short space, my mother's gentle breathing showed she slept. Two days and nights of mental grief and intense anxiety had exhausted nature.

Then came upon me a sort of dream. I felt strong and full of life. I saw myself living—and going about the world. With only half a soul and broken heart, I yet lived on. It seemed to me I grew old. I saw myself sitting, a very aged woman, looking at a curl of fair hair, and contrasting it with my own.

I awoke trembling—"Tis impossible!—I cannot live a year, a month, a day more, and endure this intolerable anguish!"

And yet something whispered—

"You will live."

"Then I must see him."

I crawled out of bed—I was conscious of pain—but all feeling was lost in the agony lest I should be prevented gaining some courage for the hard fate of living without him—by indulging in a last farewell. I dragged something—a shawl or blanket—round me, almost uttering a scream from an intense pain in my side. I reached the door—there I sank down, hoping that death was come, I was so sharply racked with spasms. But my breath came again. I crept along the floor. I was in his room. I touched his coffin! Why did I not die then?

I raised myself up, and resolutely drew the handkerchief away from his dead face. There was the smile on it that he had given me. Death had touched it and him with a beauty so much beyond

earth—I was calmed by it. I laid my head by his head, and whispered to him—

“Peter—you are now as an angel of God—in the full bloom of manhood—in the glory of an entire happiness, in the fulfilment of every human wish—you are taken, and I am left alone—so weak without you—so bereft, for you made my whole sum of wants. Ask the good God to take me to you! Ask Him—oh! ask Him.”

In my agony I tried to clasp him. Something moved under my touch. I drew down the covering, and there saw placed in the hollow of that arm, which had cradled me every night since I had been his, a little tiny form nestled there. It was our daughter. Her little delicate limbs were drawn up as if she slept, their contour seen through the soft white dress—a little tiny face, the miniature of his own, slept where I had always slept—one little waxen hand lay like the shedded leaf of a white rose on his breast.

How calm, holy, peaceful they looked—the little blossom on the full-grown perfect tree!

Again I whispered—

“Peter, you see, our little daughter is your image, as I said. Think of your Dulce, in the far-off land, separated from you both. If God permits, be to me a ministering angel. Whisper to me in my dreams. Encourage me to mourn you with a high and resolute heart. As you were to me more perfect than all God’s creatures, so let me be strengthened to mourn for you—as one lacking all things, yet living on—for the end.”

Then Nature tore from me this glimpse of Heaven and its consolations, delivering me over to the throes and agonies of human grief.

I drenched their faces with my tears. Some instinct, some feeling that no human eye should survey me in this abandonment of woe, made me keep silence, even though I shook with the agony of it, in every nerve. I know not if I should have stayed and died there of utter and entire grief, had not I felt a hand take mine, as it lay on the other side of the coffin. Looking up, I saw the white sad face of my poor little Buffy.

“Mother,” he whispered, clambering up, “think of little Peter—he can’t live without you, because my lady does not love him.”

Oh, my little Peter! as I thought of him, existence seemed necessary. The only thing left me to do for my beloved was to bring up his son to resemble him. Even in this awful hour of grief and despair, this little gleam of hope—that I could still work for him—made me exert myself.

“Bring me some scissors, Buffy.”

He crept away like a little mouse, and soon returned.

With calmness I cut off some curls from the dear head I loved so well. The little baby had downy tufts of fair hair, coming from beneath the baby cap. Buffy cut these off—being still on the other side of the bed.

"Now go, dear," I said.

"Into the next room only, mother," he replied ; and he turned into that room that had been Peter's private study, or business room.

Then I cut off some of my own hair, and placed it under the baby's head. Kissing them both, I crept away, but again returned and kissed them once more—and yet again. At last I felt that my soul had borne what it could. This going and returning, going and returning, what was it but a selfish weakness on my part? If my kind mother should wake and miss me! The little patient face of poor Buffy wistfully looked out at me from the other room. Resolutely I grasped the only thing now that was left of my husband, and passed out of sight of him for ever. That only thing was the curl of hair. My dream is fulfilled. It lies here before me now. Fair, rich, beautiful, is the curl of sixty years ago. White, dry, perished is the scanty lock just cut from my own head. But it will not be so in Heaven. We shall rise again with new bodies, purified and beautiful, through suffering.

("Mother Hubbard," said Buffy, now Sir Brough, and an aged man, when he read this, "look here, never have these little tufts of hair left my possession. You may laugh, but I declare to you the reason I have never married is that as a child I gave all a lover's love to that little baby that lived an hour. I held it in my arms when your father performed the ceremony of baptising it. When he paused—looking at some one to name it—I said 'Dulce,' and Dulce she was christened. She died on my knee an hour afterwards ; and I laid her myself in Uncle Peter's arms. I called her my little wife then, and I have imagined her growing up in Heaven, as I was growing on earth. And I am faithful to my little Dulce. Mother Hubbard, I quite long to see her!")

"Oh! Buffy, had I known **what** years were to pass before I saw them both again."

"Don't grieve, we are near them now ; and go on quickly, for this time is too dreadful to be recalled.")

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## CHAPTER XXXIII.

### ALIVE, YET DEAD.



WHEN I reached my bed I again became insensible. But youth and life were too strong within me to be destroyed by the pressure I put upon them.

Not even the injuries I had received, from being trampled on and kicked by the horse, and which appeared at first to be of a frightful nature, were permanent.

I lay in bed for seven or eight weeks, more because my spirit refused to exert itself, than because I was too ill to rise.



In the solitude of my sick-chamber I had the mourner's chiefest luxury—hours of secluded grief. As my happiness had been more than mortal, my sorrow must be in proportion. But oh! the happiness had been so brief, and the sorrow seemed each day more interminable! If a year was only passed—if I and my sorrow had become acquainted—if we were but used to each other—I might at least feel humble and resigned.

But the time came for me to think of others as well as of myself. Very tender and kind had been my father and mother. He had done the duty of father and pastor in one to his child. It was now time for him to return to his usual work.

But before he left me we had this conversation—

"Dulce, we have refrained from intruding on you until nature, and the spring that life gives even to the most desolate heart, had brought you, if not healing, at least the power to bear your lot patiently. We have now to tell you that, in addition to our natural amazement and horror at the blow it pleased the Almighty to send, the fears and anxieties we have had about you, we have some of a keen, though worldly, kind to endure. We cannot find your husband's will."

"It is in an inner drawer, on the left-hand side of his escritoire. It is enclosed in a case of parchment, endorsed as his will."

"It is not to be found."

After a little silence, I asked,

"And what happens, papa?"

"His first will, made just after his marriage, holds good."

"But it is a bad will. He was sorry he had made it. I think he destroyed it."

"Not so. It is in the possession of Lady Lanton; it must be carried out if we cannot find the other."

"Lady Lanton will come here, then, and be mistress?"

"She is already here, and is mistress."

As my father said this I saw pass over his face a strong gleam of anger and disgust. I divined at once how much he and my mother had been made to endure at her hand.

"Pray, father, say what you think—what you know. I have no more suffering to bear."

In fact, in the weakness of illness and grief, I had wondered how people cared now for sunshine—for shade. "What they should eat, what they should drink, wherewithal should they be clothed."

"Then, my dear, Lady Lanton only waits the doctor's fiat that you are convalescent, when she means to advise your returning to your first home, to live with us. It is true that your youth, and that prettiness which charms so many eyes, in some measure forbid your living alone."

"Father, cannot Mr. Allen, the lawyer who made the last will, prove Peter's wishes? My proper place is at Mallerdean, and here I shall stay."

"Doubtless your proper place is here, and Mr. Allen has threatened Lady Lanton, as far as the law allows him. He is not without strong suspicions that she has abstracted the will. He has sent her a copy of it, as a guide to the real fulfilment of her brother's wishes. But it is unnecessary to say, she acts, and will act, wholly by the first will. The one gives her full power, the other does not mention her name, so that we cannot be surprised. Meantime, my Dulce, altered as your position is by this state of things, you must comfort yourself by thinking how great was the power and trust reposed in you, as seen by the copy of the second will. It is due to the love that acknowledged the fitness of so young a wife for such power, to bear the reverse with dignity and prudence."

"I will try—but I do not leave Mallerdean."

"We do not wish you to do so. At the same time, we are wholly incapable of leaving you, grief-stricken and smitten almost to death, in the hands of Lady Lanton. She is a woman I find it very difficult, in my character of Christian and clergyman, to forgive. Indeed, I don't. Mr. Allen recommends that you should make your boy a ward in Chancery; that will, in some measure, control Lady Lanton."

"Give me time to think," I asked.

It was on that evening that Buffy, as was usual with him, came to sit with me.

"Mother Hubbard, let me tell this."

"As you will, Sir Brough."

In Sir Brough Lanton's handwriting :—

"I will not dilate upon that awful scene, which passed before our eyes as a terrible night-mare. Never can I forget it! or the cry that escaped my Mother Hubbard's lips as she flew down and caught Uncle Peter in her arms. The first blow had been enough, but still she had the unutterable satisfaction of knowing that she saved him from more. All her life long she might have been murmuring to herself, 'If I had been quicker, if he had been saved that second blow.' Now she knows that it was but one that shattered her happiness in a moment.

"Though I was little more than twelve years old, I had all the feelings of a man, and for very long afterwards I so doubted the goodness of the Almighty, that I would not say my prayers. I could not understand why two people were to be separated, than whom, never since the days of Adam, were seen so happy, so congenial a pair. It was very wicked of me, I dare say, but, to a child, it is difficult to make him reason against his conviction. 'Why was it necessary,' I thought, 'for God not only to take Uncle Peter away, but to do it in so awful a manner, and permit those who loved his every hair as the most precious thing in the world to witness it? Though, upon the whole, after the first shock, I own I have thought with satisfaction that we did see him to the last moment.'"

("'Tis true—I should have tormented myself all my life thinking had I been there I could have saved him.—D.M.")

"It struck me then, child as I was, Mother Hubbard, how meagre and feeble, not to say intolerable, were the modes of comfort suggested by various people. To be sure, you were not suffered to be worried by them. Your father said, 'God has afflicted her after that fashion, He alone can support her. We can pray for her, but more it is impossible for human nature to do.' And he was quite right. The very magnitude of the blow brought its own panacea. There could only be submission, and there were two kinds of submission; one right and one wrong. The former was sublime, as it appeared in you; the latter, revolting, as it was enacted by my lady.

"But to go on with my tale. It is impossible to describe the horror that fell upon the house, more for the living than the dead. It was supposed, and with great reason, that she, who was to my childish idea the embodiment of everything most lovable and lovely, must die too, or go mad, and evermore remain mad. Again a rumour arose that she was injured, at first fatally, then permanently. Evermore, if she lived, she was to be as shattered in body as in mind. In the midst of all this distracting fear about my more than mother, this awful pang at my heart because of Uncle Peter's death, I was painfully alive to the strangeness of my lady's conduct.

"Being unable to rest quiet anywhere—feeling, and being told I was in everybody's way, I crept behind doors, and under tables, folded myself in curtains, and lay hidden at the backs of chairs and sofas. Everywhere, and anywhere, so that I might learn something that would comfort the most broken-hearted of little boys.

"Certainly 'my lady' was violently stirred by grief. Under the influence of it she turned Philips away—he who brought the umbrella—forbidding him ever to come within the gates of Mallerdean again. She ordered the horse to be shot at once, which was done; and she desired the tower to be pulled down, every stone erased from the ground, and thrown into the river. Mr. Courtenaye's calm rebuke upon this order rather shamed her.

"'Madam,' he said, 'let not the world say we are mad. Is it a true mark of grief to resent a blow from the Almighty as the malicious stroke of a stone?'

"She then shut herself up in her room.

"I had crept behind the door that divided 'His Honour's' chambers from the rest of the house. Uncle Peter had been laid on his own bed, and my dear mother was trying what remedies were thought best to restore him. I had been sent away.

"I saw 'my lady' come out of her room, and run hurriedly down to the library. There was on her face (which was scarlet in colour) a half-guilty, half-hopeful look. I thought she was going to do something wicked, and, for want of anything better to employ myself upon, I made it my business to watch her. For two days I never suffered

her to be far out of my sight when she left her own room. It was principally in the gloom of the evening that she roamed after this fashion, prowling about, so that my pursuit of her was not very difficult ; and the more so because she was not what one calls 'clever' at deceit. She had only begun to practise it of late years, and she was wholly ignorant of the art necessary to make it effective. Nothing but the sort of consternation that had stunned every mind, prevented her purpose being discovered by any servant, even. And had there been in the house other guests besides Mr. and Mrs. Courtenaye, who were wholly absorbed by fear and care for the unhappy mourner, they must have seen the venture upon which she was hazarding her good name. To me it was plainly written on her face. I was close to her when she discovered the old will. Why was not that destroyed, I wonder? Perhaps because it was in so strange a place—evidently thrust there to be burnt at some convenient moment. It was in a sort of well, where the corner of the room brings the bookcases into juxtaposition, leaving a three-cornered crevice, into which Uncle Peter was usually in the habit of throwing all sorts of waste documents.

"I became very much bewildered in my mind after this. If I went straight to 'my lady,' and told her what I thought she was after, probably she would have me locked up or sent away. Also a dread came upon me that she was doing something so wicked, that, if she was found out, she would be beheaded, and I, her son, would be her accuser! I therefore came to the conclusion it was better to outwit her. I did not rate my intellect over-much, I considered, when I settled this with my conscience, because I had no opinion of hers. I always regarded her as the most foolish, ignorant woman I knew, governed wholly by her whims and passions. But, while I thus condemned her, I was full of horror at any exposure. All people have their weaknesses ; mine, from my earliest recollection, was the fear of my name being disgraced.

"So, having brought my bewildered mind to the crisis, that 'my lady' should pursue her way, and I would pursue mine, I followed her and it, until, on that very night, when my darling Mother Hubbard appeared, like the ghost of herself, and lay down on Uncle Peter's coffin, to weep her heart out, as it were.

"I sat almost always in that room when not watching 'my lady ;' and being there this evening, and hearing the door of his private room creak and move, as if some one was trying to open it (for it had been locked by order of the lawyer, and there was no admittance to it but through the chamber of the dead), I went in there and concealed myself in the window curtain.

"I know not how 'my lady' brought her courage up to the point of passing so close to the dead body of him she was about to outrage in the person of his wife and child—the brother she professed to adore, but whom she had not yet dared to gaze upon, wrapped and draped in all the panoply of death. To me it was the only comfort I had,

looking at him, and the little Dulce, as long as I could ; but she had refused to go near the chamber of death.

"Nevertheless she did it this night, and I just caught a glimpse of her face, which looked scared, and was not blanched by fear, but almost purple.

"She tried to be as still as a mouse, but her trembling hand jerked so, I was surprised no one heard her from the room, of which the door was open on the other side, from which door I had my only glimpse of my darling, stricken, dying Mother Hubbard.

"This has since been accounted for by the deep sleep into which Mrs. Courtenaye had fallen, and the faculties of her poor charge being numbed with sorrow and pain.

"My lady had to sit down and compose herself, when safe in the inner room. As she did so, her eyes scanned the *escritoire* ; the keys of it, she seemed to know, were in a little drawer, with a concealed spring. This she easily opened, after she had gained courage, and soon discovered the will. Her clutch of it I shall never forget, or the mingled triumph and alarm which struggled for the mastery in her countenance. For a brief moment I think the latter prevailed ; but as she took up her candle to depart with the prize, and the conviction came upon her that she must again pass through the room where lay the body of him she was so wickedly wronging, her whole frame trembled. Her knees tottered under her, and she gasped for breath. Her eyes glared round like a wild beast in a cage. She went to the locked door, and tried vainly to open it. She came so straight towards the window, I had to shrink down on to the ground. Fortunately she remembered there could be no egress from it.

"When I dared to look again, she was standing on the threshold, struggling with her fears.

"Did she fancy would the dead man arise and confront her? The wickedness of the deed might easily warrant the miracle. How long she might have battled thus I know not ; but a slight noise in the furthest room startled us both. I crept out, and saw on the other threshold a vision so ghostly—so ghastly—dimly visible in the gloom, it seemed like the spirit of Despair. Every movement was an agony, yet it came slowly on, her long hair, all floating and wild, covering her like a pall. Tottering, stricken, broken-hearted, thus entered the chamber of death—also for the first time—that other mourner. One arm was spread out, seeking for some support ; the other hung useless by her side. Her eyes were open, but apparently without sight. Failing to catch hold of any stay by which to steady herself, she sank noiselessly, slowly, like a crushed flower, on the floor, and lay there as if dead.

"In a moment, with a swift, sudden rush, my lady fled across the room, and was out of it in a breath. I heard her rapid steps, noted where she let something fall, and knew the minute when safe through the red baize door she reached the shelter of her own room, and felt

she was safe. Should I go to the assistance of her, that real mourner? I did not dare to stir. After a while, which appeared to me interminable, I saw the heap of white clothes begin to move. With slow, painful efforts she dragged herself along, and then—(oh! what a thing is grief!)

"She made no noise—a little low murmur, expressive of a mental anguish that was wringing her very soul, pierced me sharper than the shrillest scream. It was a moan of exquisite agony. As the only thing to do, I spoke to God in my heart, in angry, short sentences. I kept saying—

"Take her away, God—take her up to heaven with Uncle Peter. Don't you hear her moans? Send down an angel for her."

"And so fervent were my words, so strong my belief in the certainty that neither God or man could hear such sounds without seeking to assuage them, that I looked up, expecting the ceiling to open, and the angels come down and minister to her.

"Perhaps they did, though I, a wicked little boy, could not see them. For presently she grew calm. She drew down the coverings, and saw my little Dulce. Presently a time came when I could do her a service, as she has already described.

"Though she bid me leave the room before she did, I did not go far. I lay down on the mat at the door, that I might hear the better, that she really was safe back in bed. Thus none knew but she and I of that night's work, and she never knew until now how nearly she met, face to face, in the presence of her dead husband, his only sister, and her greatest enemy. It was only when I heard others moving in the sick-room, and knew that they were awake, and she was being cared for, that I suddenly recollected the will.

"My brain grew more bewildered than ever, as I thought how I was to gain possession of it, and that without exposing 'my lady.'

"I was faint and half-sick. So remembering that in my father's room there was always placed ready for him cordials and strengthening meats, I went there, having first undressed, and put on my night clothes, with a little dressing-gown over. A man-servant was supposed to sleep in the next room to Sir Brough, who was in fact his nurse. So I knocked at his door, but receiving no answer, I went in. Perceiving a bright light in the other room—Sir Brough's—I thought to peep in, but a voice I recognised at once asked, 'Who is there?'

"'It is me, my lady,' I answered; 'I am ill, and want a glass of Sir Brough's wine.'

"'And be a drunkard too.'

"I never cared for her hard words. She could see by my white face and red eyes that I said no untruth, so I made no answer, but sat down on a chair, and began to eat and drink of what was in the tray.

"My father kept asking at intervals, 'Who was that?' in his im-

perfect speech, and at last I rose and went to his bed-side. He always was delighted to see me—in fact, he loved me better than anybody. He was very childish now, and sometimes troublesome to manage, but he always did whatever I asked him.

“Sometimes in his wandering fits he imagined he was dead, and that I was Sir Brough; then he would call upon everyone to admire the present Sir Brough. ‘Such a fine fellow—such a noble fellow! Speaks the truth and is such a gentleman! Oh! law! such a gentleman, so unlike his brute of a father—his beast of a father—the most disgraceful, besotted vagabond!’ Then he would burst into a flood of tears.

“However, this evening he was rational, and begged of me to get on his bed and lie beside him, and tell him some news.

“‘Something funny,’ he added; ‘make me laugh, Buffy.’

“‘We must not laugh now, Sir Brough; death is in the house.’

“‘Who is it, Buffy—me or my lady?’

“‘My lady is there, by the fire, and you are here in bed.’

“‘What does my lady want here?’

“That was precisely what I wished to know myself.

“Through a chink in the curtain I could see her standing, gazing intently at the fire. This led me to notice it was a very large one, and shortly would be much too great for even Sir Brough to bear. Fresh coal had been lately added, without any necessity.

“He was very chilly always, and there were fires kept in his room at times when they were not wanted elsewhere. Instantly I saw her intention. She had come to Sir Brough’s room, as the only place where there was a good fire, to burn the will. She had dismissed the man-servant, and only waited the fire to blaze up to a proper heat, when in the will would go. I fancied I saw the shape of it under her shawl. Now I became more bewildered than ever, and the incessant and impatient chattering of Sir Brough helped to addle my brains. I made up my mind to one thing. I would not let the will be burnt. But how could I save it?

“I calculated the fire would not be ready for some time. I began to whisper all sorts of things in Sir Brough’s ear. My lady, suspicious, came to the bed to look at us. Sure enough there was the will. I could just see the end of parchment sticking out. It seemed to me to be a case, neatly sewn and bound.

“‘Why don’t you speak aloud?’ she said, angrily.

“‘He soon goes to sleep if I whisper in his ear.’

“‘Then do it at once. I wish him to sleep.’

“While I endeavoured to obey her, the thought crossed me, she would wait a little in the hope of Sir Brough sleeping. She would then dismiss me, and proceed to burn the will. But I calculated that, as it was in a case, it would take some minutes to burn that before the will was injured.

“All occurred as I expected. As she shut the door and locked it after me, forgetting I could gain entrance through the servants’ room,

I heard her begin to stir the fire. I ran away rather noiselessly, and presently came back and knocked at the door loudly.

"'Who is there?' she repeated more than once.

"'My lady, come—open, there is some one in your room.'

"'Go and see who it is.'

"I expected this answer, and went away, but I came back to the servant's room quietly and hid myself there.

"I saw she was suspicious and anxious. She kept listening for my return. At last, growing impatient, she drew forth the will, thrust it into the reddest heat, watched it crackle for a moment, and then unlocked the door and went out, relocking it as she left, and, I suppose, carrying the key away with her. I ran in, drew out the fizzing parchment, then rushed to bolt the door on the inside.

"It was a serious matter getting the will out of its burning case—the smell was awful. I burnt myself everywhere, and had not my dressing-gown been made of a sort of duffle, I should have been in a blaze. I heard her come back. She thrust the key in and turned it, but of course the door would not open. She tried again, and in her anger or violence the key bent, or broke in the ward. She tried again and again. Meantime, I had the will in my possession, terribly scorched, 'tis true. I filled the parchment case with a table napkin and bits of paper, and stuck it in, much as she had left it. I unbolted the door, and crept under the bed with my *prima* when my lady came violently rushing through the door of the servant's room.

"The odour of the burning parchment and my flannel dressing-gown, and the odds and ends I had popped into the parchment case, were now so pungent as to make Sir Brough sneeze and cough in his sleep. I had much ado to prevent myself doing the same. Fortunately my lady was similarly affected, and, after satisfying herself that the will was burning finely, she opened all the windows wide, without any regard for Sir Brough's feelings or health. He was now awake, and grumbled a good deal. She paid no heed until she was satisfied the will was burnt. Fortunately she piled more and more coals on it, with a view to its more safe destruction; and so could not see, as it curled, twisted, and sputtered in the fire that there was more inside the case than she imagined, though less than she wished.

"After awhile, thinking the room pretty well freed from the smoke and smell, which it was not, for it clung to the curtains and carpet for many days, she rang the bell, and, making some haughty excuse to the servant about burning papers, and the rubbish collected in Sir Brough's room, she bid him try to open the door, which, of course, he could not do.

"So at last she went off through his room to her own, when the windows were shut, Sir Brough pacified, and the servant departed to his own bed.

"I waited and waited, hoping to hear him snore, and show signs



that he was asleep. While I waited I revolved in my mind what was to be done with the will. In the first place, for reasons before stated, I was not going to expose my own mother. Secondly, I felt the necessity of having a confidante. I soon settled I would have none other than my Mother Hubbard herself. Reason tried to persuade me I could not select one less fitted, because she was the one most injured by my lady's deed. But nature, and the knowledge I possessed of Mother Hubbard's character, which was of that noble kind she was sure to think less of herself than Uncle Peter's sister, made me vow a childish vow that she, and she only, should be my confidante.

"Having arrived at this conclusion, I seemed to be rewarded for it by Sir Brough demanding something that was not in the room.

"Day had begun to dawn some time, and my position was critical. But this timely want of Sir Brough's sent his man down-stairs to seek it, and in a few minutes I was safe in my own bed.

"It had always struck us as a most extraordinary thing why 'my lady' had brought Sir Brough with her, as she had intimated that she desired to come alone in her letter to Uncle Peter. It was easy, however, to conjecture why she did so.

"For if Uncle Peter had forbidden her the house, common compassion would have urged him to take in an almost dying man.

"Though she was studiously polite and attentive to my father, yet his life was of little value in her eyes when she had an object in view. Poor woman !

## CHAPTER XXXIV

### TRYING TO LIVE.

"**P**ARTLY from excitement, exposure, and the terrible scene I had had with my poor Mother Hubbard, I felt unable to get up the next morning, and announced my intention to be ill.

" 'I think,' said Rumm to me as she brought my cup of tea, and tucked me up, 'you have angered my lady and darnt face her. She's been ha hasking for you ever so many times.'

" 'I am not afraid of her. Bid her come here.'

" 'Lor' bless you, master, I wud as soon face our deadly henimy !'

" 'Then leave her alone,' I answered, as if sulky.

"I had another reason for remaining in bed. Of course I had my prize in it, and before I left it I must think of some safe place in which to put it, until I could tell my confidante.

"I remained two days in bed, revolving the best plan to pursue, and unable to satisfy myself, during which time I had serious thoughts

of sending it as in a parcel to Mr. Courtenaye. It was, however, so much burnt and injured by the fire, that the truth must have been told about it, I felt sure. At last I decided. I rose from my bed, and, when dressed, took and thrust my burnt dressing-gown down a sink, and carried the will to our play-room, where I placed it in a little old box. This I locked, and threw the key after the dressing-gown. I then seemed to amuse myself by painting, and afterwards pasting pictures all over the box.

“‘Why, Lor’, master, you have apasted hup the lid!’

“‘Which I meant to do,’ I answered shortly; and having completely covered it, the top, the bottom, and the sides with pictures, I placed it in a conspicuous spot in my own room, as if it was a work of art. Thus it was always in my sight, and if any wonder was expressed at my taste, the answer was sufficient—

“‘Master is so hodd!’

“I never went in or out of my room that I did not give it a shake, to assure myself that the treasure was safe.

“For I had to wait a weary time before I could confide in my Mother Hubbard; and what was more hard to bear than anything, was the dismay and trouble into which every one fell but my lady, because the will was missing. If I had not made that vow under my father’s bed to have no confidante but my Mother Hubbard, I should have taken my ‘Work of Art’ and thrust it into Mr. Courtenaye’s or the lawyer’s hands at once. As it was, I was frightened out of my wits, there was so much importance attached to this will—there were such awful things expected to happen if it could not be found, and so much annoyance and apparent danger impending over her whom I loved above all other things, that I may say every day seemed to bring me an amount of mental agony that was unbearable.

“The child-like awe that possessed me if I broke my oath, alone kept a certain power over me, and that was nearly giving way under the aggravation of ‘my lady’s’ confidence and arrogance.

“Supremely satisfied that the will was burnt, and that no signs remained of it, she let her pride and ill-temper have full sway. She railed at Mr. Allen, insulted Mr. Courtenaye, and was absolutely shameless in what she said of and planned for her sister-in-law. As if months had passed, instead of weeks, since the honoured dead had been carried away from the home at whose threshold he met his most lamentable untimely death, she planned and ordered, altered and arranged everything in and about Mallerdean, without the slightest feeling or apparent regret. She scarcely seemed to remember she held rule there in trust; she acted as, and felt, absolute monarch and mistress.

“I own the temptation to pull her down, and sink her into a deeper pit than that into which she was thrusting my Mother Hubbard, was great. But though only twelve years of age, I could look forward to consequences, and, independent of my oath, could not see how the

gratification of the moment would mend the case. I should only tumble into greater horrors than ever.

"At last came that evening. Here I take up the thread of Mother Hubbard's story.

"I had been admitted to her room for some time, but had no opportunity to tell her my secret. Her suffering, bodily, had been, as I gathered, awful; but the greater pangs of the mind seemed to have made her impervious to them. Whether owing to the fortitude with which she endured them, or her remarkable constitution, she was now not only almost well, but entirely free from any blemish or deformity. Her father, at her desire, had left her alone, to think over her position.

"Her hands were clasped on her knees, her sad, resigned face was looking upwards. She seemed asking help from heaven and Uncle Peter. I said:

"'Mother, what punishment is given to people who steal?

"Slowly—with a slight contraction on her brow—she brought her gaze down to the level of my face.

"'Buffy looks ill!' she murmured, as if to herself.

"'Buffy is ill—very ill. Mother Hubbard, heal me!'

"I knew this demand was sufficient to make her forget her thoughts, and think only of me. With infinite tenderness she drew me to her. She was still suffering from her various injuries in some way or another, for she could hardly bear little Peter to lay his head on her shoulder or run against her knee. So her touch was like the downy feather of a bird's breast. But it sufficed for me. Again I asked my question:

"'What is done to people who steal?'

"'It depends on what they take. What has my Buffy done to make him look so ill and miserable?'

"'Are people beheaded for stealing?'

"'No.'

"'Or shot?'

"'Only soldiers, I think, and that not for stealing.'

"'Or hanged?'

"'No, no.'

"'Then mother, "my lady" stole Uncle Peter's will. I saw her do it. What will be done to her?'

"'Oh! Buffy, do not tell any one! I believe she has committed a dreadful crime.'

"'I have told no one but you.'

"'We will put it back, or pretend to discover it.'

"'It is very much burnt. Everybody will know that she has tried to destroy it.'

"I then told her my tale.

"As she lay back, thinking, I thought I had never seen any face or expression so sanctified and holy. I began to imagine, perhaps, after all, God had not been unjust. He knew there was no one like her on

earth, and meant so to try her here, that she should be worthy of one of the highest places in heaven. But could we see her there? I began to consider my ways, as it were, and if I could do anything to merit a place near her. My childish mind went off into all sorts of heroic flights of what I would and could do. Amongst others was the perplexing question, which was most right to do, to remember the fifth commandment, or the ninth? In the eyes of the Almighty, which virtue was most sublime, honouring a parent, or doing one's duty by one's neighbour? I am afraid there was little respect for 'my lady' in my heart. This naturally deprived her of my sympathy. In fact, my feelings of piety, having, as I said before, received a great shock, there was but one item in 'my lady's' favour. I did not wish the name of Lanton to be disgraced. Nevertheless, as I looked at my poor mourning, resigned Mother Hubbard, every good feeling in my heart was roused, and I was ready to be and do anything, so that I might be near and of use to her.

"In general, the judgment of a child is pretty correct. It is a good deal founded on instinct. But mine had been so stunned by the terrible overthrow of every happiness, that I seemed to be without the power to distinguish right from wrong.

"'Buffy, you and I and my little son will go and live at Dulce Domum—I would rather be quiet. Then I shall be at Mallerdean, and yet untroubled.'

"I kissed her dear hand with the utmost tenderness and joy. Here was the happiest solution of all our difficulties. Her own dear face lightened with a struggling ray of satisfaction.

"'I want to see my father,' she added, with a sort of eagerness. Poor darling! what an awful change! However, I have done."

Here ends Buffy's narrative.

When my dear father came, I said to him :

"Papa, there can be nothing wrong in my desire to live quiet and alone for some time? I wish to get accustomed to my fate. Only in the deepest seclusion can I and my sorrow become 'acquainted.'"

"Your request is not only reasonable, but what your mother and I desire for you. It is necessary that without that excess of woe, which does not so much honour the dead as it degrades the holiness of sorrow, parading it before the eyes of the world with a singularity that attracts notice; yet it is expedient that you should have time and opportunity given you to bewail your dead, the blight that has fallen on your brightest days. Your mind should be suffered to recover the shock, and your constitution its elasticity. But we cannot agree with Lady Lanton that this time should be passed in your old home. Though indeed your mother and I can scarce forbear taking you into our arms, and never letting you quit their shelter more, our darling, our sweet, docile child, our delight and pride, who made all love her, and caused us name her, with words overflowing in gratitude and praise to Almighty God for so gracious a child. Oh! child, my child!

would God I could have saved thee this misery—would God I could have died for him—for him !”

Solemn and affecting is the grief of a man. I, hitherto appraised in my own mind as the chiefest mourner the world could show or history record, found myself endeavouring to comfort another. I wiped the tears from my father’s face, and, kissing him fondly, uttered little broken sentences of love and tenderness.

So much I owed my father all my life, and yet in nothing so much as in this tender sympathy and mourning for me.

When he was calm I said—

“Dear father, that cottage, Dulce Domum, is my own, my very own. I will go and live there, with yours and my mother’s permission.”

“A good thought, my dear—you will be at Mallerdean, and yet not at Mallerdean. I think it for your advantage to live among the people who have adopted you for their own. We have been deeply gratified by the love and sympathy expressed by all classes for you, my Dulce, which is another reason why I do not wish you removed from a sphere where I still hope to see you acting the part you have so well begun. Your son’s interests are yours, and they belong to his home, notwithstanding the attitude Lady Lanton assumes. That is my only fear in leaving you here, namely, the power she possesses, which we cannot expect but she will use—to annoy you.”

“I will look at his grave, and remember she is his sister.”

“No doubt, love ; but ’tis a fearful thing to have to do with a nature that revels in notoriety, and is most happy when most hated. But we have one weapon against her—if she goes too far, we must make use of the law.”

“Then, father, let that settle itself. I beg of you and my mother to get me removed to Dulce Domum as soon as may be ; and do not fear that, in leaving me alone there with my sorrow, I shall forget the mercies of God, or the gratitude I owe you. I will not make an ill use of my seclusion, but the rather learn to submit with a courage and fortitude befitting the widow of Peter Mallerdean.”

“God bless you, my child ! May He have you in His holy keeping, and enable you to come out of the fiery furnace of His wrath purified and resigned !”

So one evening, in the gloaming, I was carried downstairs, and out into the air, by a little side-door. My mother was so tenderly careful of my feelings. There was my chair, with its blue satin lining, and inside, waiting for me, my little son. When he and I were shut up in it, the porters came and carried us to Dulce Domum. I prayed to God, like one just at the gasp of an overwhelming despair.

But arriving there, I grew calm. There is a sensitiveness attending true grief which forbids an outward show of the inward wound ; a tenderness of anguish that quivers at a breath of exposure, even to those that one loves ; so I entered my once happy Dulce Domum,

now to be the tomb of hidden tears and passionate griefs, with composure.

In taking leave of me, some few days after, my mother said—

“We have left you almost in ignorance of the world’s opinion and doings, my dearest. I think, therefore, I ought to let you know Captain Moffat has become member for Mallerdean, and has paid such assiduous court to Lady Lanton, he is now a favourite with her. She needs a friend of some sort, for it is very generally reported that she has destroyed your husband’s will; and her unpopularity before has now increased to an ill-will and rancour throughout the county that is quite grievous. By-and-bye, my Dulce, you must use your influence to soften people’s hearts towards her, for I think she means to do her duty by your boy’s property.”

“I think so too, mother; if she loves anything, it is Mallerdean. Yet is she of so strange a disposition, that should anything cross her, or disgust her, she might throw up the trust in a moment.”

“We think alike, my dear. When I told her your sole wish was to live in retirement at your little cottage, and that you were glad she had the charge of Mallerdean instead of yourself, she startled me by a very strange expression of countenance. I saw at once she was mortified. I have said nothing to your father of my impressions; but I see we agree in her character. Unthwarted, she soon tires of what she most desired. Opposed, and she will outrage every good feeling to gain her end. Such a character we can pity, my love; for it is indeed a misfortune to have it!”

And so my parents left me; and I began what I thought was a life of patient devotion and pious resignation. Hitherto, it seemed to me that nothing had been said by God or man that could actually be specified as comfort. I was submitting patiently—but was that comfort? By no means. I craved for some other feeling than this hopeless, blank despair—this wearying pain, that seemed to increase as each day brought forth the usual habits of life—in each and all of which I missed him, with the keen misery that made them all hateful to me. I lived by sufferance. I could neither eat, drink, sleep, walk, go here, go there without the pang that I did it all alone. No one now to consult. No one now to seek, to linger near, to laugh with, to pray with, to love, to think of, to dream of, to be mine—my second self!

In the morning I awoke knowing I was to be all day a miserable mourner; in the evening I went to bed, feeling I was more desolate still. Not naturally desponding, or loving melancholy—on the contrary, buoyant and hopeful, I could not see a ray of comfort, much less joy, through the long vista of years that kept rising and rising ever before me.

I saw no one but my dear Buffy and the three servants who composed the household with my boy. I did not go out at first, being still too enfeebled. One evening Buffy said to me,

"Will you come with me to Uncle Peter's grave?"

"I wish to go there, but not seen."

"If we went early in the morning—by sunrise!"

We did so. Happily that strong instinct that would not let me parade my grief, shortened the trial; for as the world woke up to pursue its round, we crept back to the shelter of home. Buffy supported me there each morning and left me. When he saw the world stirring he would come to assist me home.

These visits comforted me; I seemed to gain strength to go through the day.

When I became strong enough to go without Buffy's help, I went by myself, and he came for me.

About this time I perceived he was unhappy.

"Mother," he replied upon my questioning him, "I shall have to disclose that secret. My lady is so aggravating that I am on the point every day of telling her the fact."

"Buffy, here on the grave we must bind each other not to reveal the secret without the leave of the other."

"Thanks, mother; I must be bound morally or physically, because I can't hold my tongue without. She is wholly occupied in devising means to annoy you. She intends to allow you no egress into the park, or anywhere but by the river and the carriage-drive."

"Take the deeds of the cottage to Mr. Allen, and tell him to uphold my rights; and now let us promise each to the other."

We did so; and this compact, entered into by a child of twelve and a woman whose brain was stunned by grief, was spoken by both of us as solemnly as an oath. Whether we kept it, or what we endured keeping it, or the necessity for taking it, will be proved by the end. Doubtless we were greatly to blame. A few weeks' wonder would have settled the matter as regarded Lady Lanton. She could not be more unpopular. People would have lost sight of her crime in the gratification of finding that all was right, and that they had thought correctly. Lady Lanton's nefarious attempt would have given place to another wonder, and that was all.

But we were now the criminals, and it was right we should suffer.

The "Work of Art" enjoyed a conspicuous position in my room, where it was used as the support to a small oil-lamp. My boy was especially fond of having it to play with—and while looking at the pictures, assisted by his beloved Buffy, would shake it and listen to the rattle within, as delighted as if it was music he heard. Upon such occasions, if our eyes met, Buffy blushed deeply, and I sighed. It seemed as if the child was incited to mock us, and make us feel that he was being wronged. I never hid from myself that self was a good deal to blame for my share in this matter—I desired only to live to myself and child. To mix in the world—to have to think of any other subject than the one—a perpetual mourning for his loss, was all I craved. Had I been exalted to the position in which my husband so fondly, so proudly

placed me, my solitude must have been perpetually broken—the sacred hours of grief curtailed—and a variety of intrusions must have wearied and irritated me. All the perplexing and never-ending cares of a large estate would have intruded upon me at every turn. I should never have had time to bewail my dead. There was nothing left me to do for him but to mourn him. I begrudged the least moment that was taken from this duty. Grief shows itself in as many forms as joy. If mine was an exaggerated, unhealthy, cankered sorrow, it must be remembered that my nature was given to excess. In the nursery, in girlhood—as a maiden, a wife, a mother—I was always in extremes. Love had elevated me to the position of goddess and queen—sorrow sent me down to the very ashes of despair. Among these ashes I laid me down; they became my companions, my bed-fellows, my bosom friends—I covered myself with them—I mixed them with my food, with the water I drank; I clothed myself with them, and thought in the depth of this degradation that I was honouring the dead.

## CHAPTER XXXV.

## RESIGNATION.



ONE evening, just when winter typified the state of my own heart—and days were at their darkest—I heard the unusual sound of the door-bell.

Before I had gathered my scared senses together, the sliding door flew back—and as if to give the lie to the murmur in my heart, that there was no more love left for me in the world—Marblette stood in the door-way. In an instant, before her arms were round me, or her soft kiss had touched my lips—I felt the strong loves of my childhood rise like a revivifying spring in my heart.

And yet there was as much agony as pleasure at the sight of her. When last we met, I was crowned with a happiness she had not realised. Now I saw in the soft expression of her face, in the sweet spirit that glistened from her eyes, in her gentle low words of love, that none in all my world could better understand the immensity of my woe. She lived on love—and felt that I was bearing what she could not. Therefore she gave me a soothing homage—pouring over me sweet words of tender sympathy, that were the sweeter because they were so true. She did not tell me then, though I learnt it afterwards—that with much peril, and alone—in disguise, and often in danger, she had braved everything to come and see her poor stricken Dudu. And Hythe had encouraged her to do it.

To her I unlocked my heart, closed with grief to all others.

As to her I had confided the first dawnings of love, so now did I



pour out the bitterness of my desolate state. She came to me at a good time, restoring my mind to a healthy tone. Almost her first words brought a healing power.

"I cannot comfort you—but God loves you. When we die, we go alone to the grave—when we grieve, we must go alone to His arms. From thence He will restore you, strengthened and purified, to go on with his work."

Some natures have the subtle power of charming one imperceptibly. Thus had Marblette a certain spell by which she warmed my heart into life and love. I had said—

"Oh, Marblette, if once again we were at Alvestone—if the last four years could be blotted from my mind—if I had not tasted this cup of happiness, and I was again the wild Dudu, there might be happiness yet in store for me!"

"Not so," she answered; "that is for one to say who is selfish in her grief. You are to be happy again—happy in rising superior to the blow that would prostrate a weaker spirit. As our Peter let nothing interfere with what he considered his duty, so will you honour his memory by resolutely doing yours. What! Regret that you have been his wife, because you cannot live and be his widow! Ah! Dulce, I know you better than you do yourself. You will honour his memory by the spirit in which you resign yourself to the chastening of the Lord."

There was always a confidence and fervour in all that Marblette said, which awaked a corresponding glow in the dullest heart that heard her.

While she was with me, poor grandmamma fell dangerously ill. In obedience to her prognostications that my grief would not make me selfish, I was the first to urge Marblette to go to Alvestone.

My father and mother were already there, summoned by Philip. As for dear Sissy, we were told she was paralysed by sorrow.

"Now, that is a thing which surprises me in Sissy," said Marblette. "Here is grandmamma going home, the home she has all her life been fitting herself for, and Sissy bemoans over it. She may grieve for her own loss, but why arraign the Almighty as unjust, for taking a faithful servant to her rest? Come with me, Dulce. We three have been merry together, it is right that we should mourn together."

I obeyed her wishes, and was the more glad I did so, because grandmamma had asked for me.

When she saw my face by her bed-side, a sudden power made her rise, and putting a hand on each cheek, she drew me towards her, exclaiming, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken her!" It was like a cry.

Then she fell back, and, closing her eyes, seemed to pray for me, the tears running down her aged cheeks. But she blessed me for coming to her, and said that it was her best comfort to see those who had given her so much content and pleasure near her. She would

wish no greater boon than to gaze upon our faces, as the last earthly sight in view.

So we three, who had passed the pleasant pastime of youthful days with our kind grandmother, gathered round her dying bed, full of those remorseful regrets that crowd in on affectionate hearts at such times. How we regretted we had not loved her more, obeyed her better, and studied her little fancies with more eagerness and attention! Just as she was about to require nothing at our hands, we would have given the world to be what we once were to her.

Her death-bed was a further comfort to me, as being able to regard death in a holy and pure light. No longer presenting himself as a hideous and awful destroyer, as a monster who ruthlessly tore asunder the tenderest, sweetest ties, I saw his gentle approach to her was as the soft rustle of angels' wings, spreading a perfume of Heaven all around her death-bed. She awaited his touch with awe, mingled with a serenity that made us look upon her as already blest. I envied her, for was she not on the point of drawing aside the veil of this flesh, and of beholding all that we are to live for everlastingly?—and among the welcoming crowd of blessed spirits to recognise the mourned—the beloved? Ah, me!

“My child,” whispered grandmamma to me in dying accents, “we shall be waiting at the gate when your turn comes, he and I. We loved you, Dulce—none other in all the world loved you better. Let me see, from beneath the shadow of the Almighty wings, that you lose not the high place you have gained in our hearts, by unbecoming grief. Go out into the world, seek in the fields, the lanes, the by-ways of the world, and you will find everywhere the cry, ‘Whose sorrow is like unto my sorrow?’”

And so grandmamma died, and a link in our lives was broken.

During the period which intervenes between the spirit passing away and the body being returned to the dust from which it sprang, we three spent much of our time together.

Sissy seemed to derive her greatest comfort from talking over our days of girlhood, and recalling all the tender acts of our grandmother towards us.

And if in looking on their lot, each with another love to indemnify them for hers we had lost, I felt my grief again stealing with fatal and selfish power over my heart, Marblette was sure to divine it, and redouble all her fond attentions.

She guarded me from the kind but outspoken sympathy of the Rees, whose dismay at the change in me was vehement.

But we all noticed that when I was by, the sisters were gentle and affectionate to each other, and Miss Rees was considerate and dutiful to her mother. They seemed to lay aside their little asperities, and paid a deference to the spectacle of one blighted almost to death.

My father had said that “the parade of woe was painful to witness,

and a seclusion persisted in proved oftentimes worse to escape from than the grief itself."

In a word he meant, any singularity adopted, or law laid down by grief, which was not to be infringed, laid that grief bare, cutting into the very soul of it. For the circumstances and duties of life were altogether antagonistic to private rules and enforcements of extreme sorrow.

In some measure realising what he meant me to avoid, I began to take my place among them all as usual. And if it was irksome, and sometimes indeed exquisitely painful, yet I felt I "had done what I could."

Thus my old girlhood's friends broke open my wounds at every turn. Their own little eccentricities and habits, that had formerly been an amusement, now were torture.

The General and Audrey had not the power to refrain from the expression of their thoughts, while Mrs. Wallis, in her endeavours to keep them within bounds, made matters worse.

I longed to be back once more to the solitude of my cottage. It seemed to me as if I had forgotten Peter, in permitting any other thoughts to occupy me. And at times Sissy vexed me with her paroxysms of grief. What was any grief to mine?

So strange and inconsistent are the wailings of human sorrow. But as I said before, I did not wish to parade my woe. I only thought none other could match it. We went home again, all our last duties paid to her who had made us so happy. I began to see that my dear Marblette's eyes had a shade in them, and her fair face was losing its bloom.

"You shall now leave me, dear, knowing you have been my best comfort," I said to her.

"Yes, I must go," she answered.

"It is not like you to be troubled, Marblette."

There was a slight contraction on her brow. Nothing but the most intense anxiety brought it there. A fear shot through me. Absorbed in my private grief, I had not of late noticed public affairs. Could it be possible that some danger affected Hythe and her children?

Marblette had left little twin daughters, as well as her husband, to come to me.

If my fate should be hers? Had God decreed she was to suffer as I had suffered.

"Oh! no, no," I exclaimed aloud, turning, and taking her in my arms—"oh! no, Marblette. I never look at you without thanking God I suffer, and not you!"

"I know it, Dulce, I know it. Hythe would not let me risk the journey back again by myself. He is coming for me. He ought to have arrived days ago. If he should be taken prisoner—if he should be endangered—if—oh! Dulce—"

And for the first and only time in her life, Marblette fainted away.

Resolutely she had kept her fears from me, and that fine spirit, which was composed of such faith, such trust, and hope in God, succumbed to a mortal fear.

A gleam of exquisite joy once more filled my heart, as I heard the bustle of an arrival at the door; and I felt neither envy nor anguish, but almost as if my husband were near me, when I witnessed life and consciousness returning, and knew that as she opened her eyes they would rest upon her husband.

As I watched the outpouring of their love for each other, I blessed God for the sight. It was of so ardent, so profound a nature, it was beautiful to witness. And they knew that of all the consolations poured into my heart by God and man, nothing comforted me so much as this.

They could not stay long, and indeed I did not wish them to do so. Marblette had done what she could for me, in rousing me out of the first stupor of despair. I was now in the open road of duty and submission. A sort of peace had been proclaimed, which enabled them to return with safety and expedition to their children and their home. I had another reason for wishing them to leave me. I would not have their kind hearts wounded by the deeds of Lady Lanton. It now becomes necessary for me to enter into the history of our contentions.

Each day since that unfortunate promise with which Buffy and I had bound each other regarding the half-burnt will, I had fresh reason for regretting the decision we made.

He had gone to Eton, and knew but a part of the persecution that set in against me, to force me to quit Dulce Domum.

A huge, unsightly wall had been built all round the small domain I could legally claim as mine. This did not trouble me much, as I ordered a door to be made in it, through which I gained an entrance into Ravenshawe at my will.

I had an outlet to the village by the carriage road, and a small foot-bridge over the river, which led to the grounds of Lady Joyce."

She seemed intuitively to know when I was likely to be tormented by a visit from Lady Lanton. I think the summer-house in her garden commanded a view of the Mallerdean drive, and, whether she watched it, or employed others to do so, it is certain that Lady Lanton rarely made me a visit that Lady Joyce did not contrive to be near at hand. Her presence was a safeguard in some respects, as Lady Lanton had still sufficient pride to keep her temper in the presence of strangers.

In what I have to say of the next few years of my life, I must begin at the outset by confessing that all the annoyance, vexation, and trouble I endured, I deserved. I brought my fate on my own head, and hope, in the detail thereof, I shall not lose sight of this fact.

With regard to my annuity (one thousand pounds a year), the

first quarterly payments, when simply to care for anything was wholly out of my power, were sent me regularly enough. As Lady Lanton felt her power, and became more strongly seated in her position, she made me feel, more than once, what it was to be straitened for money. That is, she signed the cheques necessary for me to have my money—presented to her by the agent at the proper periods—but she retained them in her possession. To give them up, or send them to me, seemed absolute torture to her. Once or twice, when the agent, Mr. Dempster, firmly refused to leave the room without them, she hurled them at his head, with cries of almost insane rage.

The sum apportioned for my son had been left to her decision in the will. I could not, therefore, calculate upon anything for him, unless I sent a notice that he required shoes, stockings, or things less trifling, when she would buy them herself, and send them down to the cottage, directed to Peter Mallerdean, Esq. How she could !

Fortunately my expenses were moderate for the first year, and, by that time, I was enabled to forestall the difficulty. I mean I was prepared for it. I took heedful account of every farthing, and made use of all the privileges I possessed as the owner of Dulce Domum. These privileges consisted of a right to cut as much wood as I pleased in Ravenshawe, to use as much of the park as suited me for pasture. By the advice of Mr. Dempster, I bought sheep, and formed the nucleus of a large dairy. The former sufficed, with poultry, to keep my house, and the latter enabled me to exchange my butter and cheese with the tenants for wheat, and such things as I required.

The different charities and schools to which I had subscribed as Mistress of Mallerdean, and Queen of the County, I was not willing to give up. For the honour of the name I bore, I meant still to be their Queen, if they would have me. But that necessitated the doing without a carriage, or even a pony, which was, so far, no inconvenience, as the necessary accommodation for them had never been added to the cottage.

By the world at large it was naturally supposed we (I and my son) had the use of the Mallerdean carriages. And, not to blazon out the contrary, I sent always for them when my boy required them. Having satisfied herself that I adhered strictly to this rule, Lady Lanton relaxed her vigilance on this matter.

Just as I was beginning to feel what it was to be dependent, and to fear the consequences, I received a letter from a gentleman signing himself "Cator." With difficulty I brought my mind to think upon the subject of his letter. It gave me pangs of jealousy, just as if Peter had been alive. It was about that boy.

Mr. Cator said, "that having written repeatedly to the executors of the late Mr. Mallerdean regarding his ward, he now must appeal to me. Not that he required money at present, but he was anxious to know where he was to look for the proper and regular payment of the

sum allotted, two hundred a year, which had hitherto always been paid in advance by the late Mr. Mallerdean."

This letter had been up to Mallerdean House, retained there upwards of a week by Lady Lanton, and finally had reached me through the thoughtfulness of the servants there. I sat and mused over it—the hot blood rushing all over and through me, with anger and disgust at the apathy, not to say selfishness, of the man who could write in this fashion to me, the widow. It is true, I had felt already that the world, even the Mallerdean world, only remembered the great tragedy of my life when they saw me, and my appearance smote their inconstant hearts, but still I was deeply wounded by it. It seemed an insult to his memory ; a mourner resents that beyond all other things.

And yet I must answer the letter. I must promise the money. Henceforth I was to be the guardian of that boy.

Oh, Peter ! I loved you well !—but you know it. I wrote to Mr. Cator by that post, claiming the boy as my ward, and making myself answerable for the payment of the two hundred a-year.

That night I spoke to Peter in my dreams. With some slight sort of sickly joy, I told him how I had torn out a jealousy, a prejudice, nay, a hatred, in my heart, and all for his sake.

O God ! merciful God ! that is a gift Thou hast given us, the angels might envy—the power of self-conquest. Love for Peter first softened, then dissolved aversion for another. Though separated from me by the blue vaults of heaven—by the veil of the flesh, by the touch of death, by the fiat of the Almighty—I could do something for thee still, Peter !

Pursuing these thoughts, I had not heeded the ringing of the door-bell, which sound—alas to me !—was always accompanied by a shiver. I had to force myself to see people. On this occasion they were being ushered into the room before I knew of their approach. A gentleman and a boy.

His card handed to me by the servant was the only preparation I had for seeing Mr. Cator, and—well, I had hoped never to see him.

There he was before me ! Like somebody—who was that somebody ? Not Peter ! oh ! not Peter ! In no one particular—in not a single feature, by not even the curl of a hair, or the turn of expression—by no movement, either grave, silent, talking, laughing, was this presumed son of Peter's like Peter. He was not—could not be his son. My God, how comforted I felt ! How gentle I became and calm ! Instead of resenting this intrusion of a stranger upon solitude such as mine, I felt grateful to him. I sent for my son, just to please myself. The innocent darling fellow—now almost four years old—took upon himself to do the honours to the young stranger. The beautiful, lordly young host abashed this shy, this awkward boy. True, he was at a hobbledehoy age—he was also overgrown and shamblly—with a vacant look, and a fat though well-featured face.

There was not a drop of Mallerdean blood in his veins, while from the crown of his head to the sole of his foot my boy was his father over again.

But I said to myself—

“Crush this pride—this naughtiness of your heart; treat him as your husband’s ward, and compare the boys no longer. It is degrading to the one, useless to the other.”

Mr. Cator was one of those many instances that one meets with, going to and fro in the world, whose anxiety about their own interests makes them forget the common elements of humanity—the absolute value of self-denial.

Sending the children away (there was apparently ten years difference in their ages), he began to excuse his intrusion by stating the anxiety he endured at having received no answer to his repeated letters. The year would expire in the ensuing week, and he felt it due to himself and family to enforce some arrangement for his remuneration, or to leave the boy with the friends of his reputed guardian.

“I am not without some idea,” continued Mr. Cator, looking extremely like our cousin Robert, thus showing that pitiful, sorry natures, wherever they appear, are marked as indelibly as twin brothers—“I am not without some idea as to the matter of his birth, though, of course, I give no hint where I live. We live in a sociable neighbourhood, but our friends pride themselves a good deal in exclusiveness, and if they knew my charge was illegitimate——”

“Did Mr. Mallerdean tell you he was that?”

“No, madam, no; and that is the only thing that induces me to think I may perhaps be wrong. As a boy, Mr. Mallerdean was the very soul of honour—as a young man, he was almost too conscientiously so. I therefore have thought at times, had the boy’s birth been—I understand, madam—I think he would have told me.”

“Then why do you doubt it to me?”

“Well, madam, receiving no reply to my numerous letters, I was suspicious. I thought young men will be young men—that we cannot help. Perhaps this boy’s birth is owing to some unfortunate occurrence in the Mallerdean family, and therefore they wish to ignore him. But, madam, such is my regard for the family—my desire to keep pure the name of a pupil for whom I not only had the highest respect, but the greatest regard—I am prepared—I came here prepared, still to undertake the charge of him, at a slight decrease of salary.”

“You can go home, sir, and take the boy with you. A letter will be waiting your arrival, with a cheque for fifty pounds in it, and a guarantee for the same sum quarterly. Good morning.”

After they were gone, I went out—I went to the same tree where Peter found me after writing that letter to the Countess Harmann.

I gave myself up for a time to what has been termed the “luxury of woe.”

Then God sent down the soothing influence of His Spirit. In the hush that followed I seemed to hear an echo of my own sobs. Truly there was some mourner near, as well as myself.

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

## OTHER SORROWS.



ROSE up, and proceeded in the direction of the sounds. As I drew nearer, I heard a man's voice, which said, "Don't ye, dame, don't ye whimper so. The lass is none the worse, I tell ye. Mick is ready to marry her to-morrow."

"She wunnot, Master Miles, she wunnot ; he has humbled her, and broken my heart. Oh ! the sweet bit thing ! that was ! A very snaw-drop for beauty and guidness !"

"She wor that, dame, she wor. I loves her in my very heart, and wish to my soul Mick had been drunk in the very gutters of Mallerdean, or he should hae harmed her. Now, wilt thou go to the lady. If a body can help us baith, it will be my lady, Mistress Mallerdean."

"I darsn't, Farmer Miles, I darsn't ; this is the third day as I have ventured, and never gotten no furdur nor this."

"But she be joost the very blessed lady to tell us the right thing."

"Na, na, she's ower saintly. Thou shouldst see her in church."

"I have dune so. Dost think I could hae lived sae lang since that awful day, and never turned to see her ? I was bound to do it, and I say agin, go you to her, she'll counsil us all."

"It's not possible, Master Miles, it wunna be right to put **ony** thing between her and her grief."

But I was already standing before them.

Their sympathy was heartfelt. Manlike, the good farmer could not control his feelings, but the instinctive delicacy of the woman, wounded, too, in sorest fashion, made her refrain at once from further display, and taught her to turn at once to her own grief. Mr. Miles moved away out of sight. Then kneeling on the sward, this poor broken-hearted mother told her sad tale, laying at last, in the agony of her woe, her head upon my feet.

"My anely one, the sweetest, dearest bairn, sae guid, sich a singer, and never a cross word did a body ever say till her. I was owre prood, that wor it, and the Lord has smit me down to the dust. I wadna mind mysel, but she'll greet ty her death. I'll lose my Mary, I wull."

I remembered the girl well. One of those sweet modest little country maidens, that remind one of the sweet wild-flowers,



As I felt the hopelessness of the poor woman's grief, I remembered David's choice : " Let me now fall into the hands of the Lord, for His mercies are great, but let me not fall into the hands of man." Sin brings sharper woes than God's command : " Give me the delight of thine eyes."

The poor woman's story, laid bare, was simple, yet uncommon.

Something like my neighbours, the Ritsons, she, seeing the fair promise of the girl, had brought her up much above the usual manner of cotters' children. She had slaved and toiled, keeping little Mary almost as delicately nurtured as a lady. Everything that was taught in those days Mary was given the chance to learn. Her prettiness, and smiling artlessness, had gained her many friends ; and her mother's heart dilated into the fulness of pride when she found that young Michael Miles, Master Miles's own nephew, and supposed heir, was really and truly courting her. Her Mary's piety and modesty had always kept pace with the many advantages her mother had slaved to get her, and she was so much respected and admired that Mr. Miles had been heard to say he would like no girl better in all the country side for his niece. The last time the poor mother saw her girl happy was when she was preparing, with her mother's leave, to go down a mile of the lane, to meet Michael coming home from the election of Captain Moffat as member for Mallerdean.

" He had no business there, as I told 'un, madam," said Miles, who had now joined us. " I was minded, as you know, madam, to side wi' Tories, until they most maddened me wi' their gibes and caricatures, or some sich things. And ever syne that day I hae been a Whig, and I were a-telling Mick as no decent honest face would be a-showing of itself at Mallerdean to vote for a man as hadn't the decency to wait until—until, I begs pardon, madam, but his addresses to the voters was all a-posted over the whole town, even on the very park trees, and the great Mallerdean gates, afore even our good and worthy member, beloved by all, was buried. Folks cried shame ! and it wor so. It wor a dommed shame ! It wor the ondacentest thing ! and if I live to be a hundred, or the deil himself comes to oppose Captain Moffat, he shall have my vote. And many more's of my mind. And he puts it about, Madam, as you be turned too, which is more than ought on us believes. We mun get young master to come forward, he as rode wi' your leddyship that day canvassing ; he be a rare fine chap, him be, for all he is sickly-like ; but you bring him forward, madam, and we'll return him, until the young Squire be ould enuf ; them Tories do sicken me, they do. But I be a-forgetting that there nevey o' mine ; he went, and there wor a deal of drink, and warring and speechifying, and he meets that little innocent Mary in the lane, luiking like a rosebud, and the devil puts it into him to do her a mortal harm."

" She would not come home, Madame Mallerdean. I was a-luiking for her everywheres, and she wor hid i' the bushes, a'most wild-like—

oh ! my Mary, my pretty blossom, may God forgive me for cursing him who had changed my Mary from the loveliest flower to a blighted weed !”

“It happened,” said Miles, “I was a-coming doon the road a-luiking for Mick—he was summat of a favourite wi’ us all, and his mither was a bit anxious, knowing as he wor a wild ’un on occasions, and that Moffat was not a man like our own member, who hated drunkenness and ill ways. So I was a-luiking for him when I met the dame. Seeing her so flustered, I rode hard along, and I heard as Mick had set oot for home this good bit, so I rides back, and a-seeking him. Well, the dame was in mortal fear, when sudden my dog Trap rushes up the brake, and begins a-whining. I ties my horse to the gait, and goes arter him, and then I finds the puir lass wi’ her eyes staring, and altogether just as if her wor struck wi’ madness. But she screams like a sea-mew when she sees her mother, and goes off into fits. I helped the dame to get her hame, and then I goes after the lad, and when I cotched him I put my hunting-whip about him, madam, with a right good will. He looked like a lashed hound. He were back i’ the town, at a little public, drinking himself blind drunk. The folks thought as I hit him for that—he knowed better, he follard me out at my bidding, and I lashed him hoame.”

“He is penitent, then?”

“Ay ! he be ; but what’s the good of that ? The girl wunnot hear tell of his neame ; and, madam, I honour her for it. Mick is on his knees to marry her, by night and day, she wunnot, she wunnot !”

Here the poor mother looked up at me.

I could not resist the look, but said :

“So do I honour her, dear, sweet, injured child !”

“But, madam, it be the best thing on all sides. At the present none know but we four. The neighbours think as Mary is down in a fever, and they need think no more. A word from you, Madam Mallerdean, mappen would put all straight with the girl. I will take them in wi’ me, and Mary shall be mistress at aince.”

“I will do my best, Mr. Miles. In a worldly point of view, yours is much the best plan, but little Mary’s nature seems so pure and good, I fear no reasoning will weigh with her.”

It did not. She only gave me one answer :

“Madam, no man shall look down upon me. I will live on, for my mother’s sake ; but I hate Michael Miles far more than ever I loved him.”

Great as her spirit was to resent, her body was very feeble—she faded like a flower.

I brought her and her mother down to Dulce Domum for a change. In the evening I made little Mary sit with me, and in the artless outpourings of her heart I learned many a lesson of patience and resignation.

Such true piety, such a strong perception of the presence of the Almighty, I never met with before or since. It was when they were in the house that I had to go through the solemn ordeal of the anniversary of that dreadful day. As it approached, all my first feelings of it came upon me like an overwhelming avalanche of desolation. When it came, I shut myself up; only God alone could see me. Towards night, the poor little forlorn Mary entreated to come in. We mourned together.

"God humbles us all, my lady; we have each our cross. When was ever such sadness, such a misfortune, as yours, my lady? I cried night after night, until mother was angered at me. I said, 'So good a lady, so sweet and gentle, who is making this place a real paradise with her thoughtfulness and care, and inclines people to be good, only with smiling on them. Oh! mother,' I said, 'that she should be more heavily afflicted than any one was in this world!' 'I don't know that,' answers mother. And, oh! my lady, what think you?"

"I cannot tell, Mary; we have each of us, I suppose, the burden put upon us we least can bear."

"When I first saw you, my lady, in church, ye had that look as if ye had been to heaven, and come back. I says to mother, 'When ye want comfort, mother, go to my lady; she has been to God's throne to seek it.' Mother will want comfort, madam."

"I fear, Mary, that it will be so. You gain no strength."

"I dinna want to. I would be away from this evil world, please, my lady, if it is not wicked."

"I do not know that it is wicked, but still you should think of your mother."

"I do, my lady, but mother thinks too much of her bonny Mary. Had I not been bonny, I had not been unfortunate. What be that?"

It was a hurried tap at the drawing-room window.

More annoyed than frightened, I drew back the curtain and opened the window, in spite of a dark shadowing figure that I saw outside. Mary and I had ceased to fear further misfortune.

The figure abruptly stepped into the room without a word, and removing her thick veil I saw Agnes Ritson. That the Beauty should be out at this time of night unguarded—her complexion exposed to a cutting wind, and her feet all wet—astonished me. I dismissed Mary, and we both sat down.

"I ought to ask you to excuse my abrupt appearance, Mrs. Mallerdean, and this night of all nights. I have wanted to come every night the last two or three months, and I daren't wait any longer. Oh! Mrs. Mallerdean, I have come to you for help. You are the only person in the world who can assist me."

Not all my ingenuity, not the most vivid stretch of imagination, could suggest to me how it was possible that the Ritson beauty should

be in trouble, or should desire assistance from any other hands than those of her own adoring household.

"They all think so much of you, dear Mrs. Mallerdean ; my sisters think there is no one like you, and as for my father, we have only to say Mrs. Mallerdean likes this or that, and he gives way at once. But Lady Lanton, she is so severe, if she only knew (oh ! I hope she never will), it will be such a bitter blow to my sisters, if she hears her ill-natured remarks are likely to be true. It was not my fault, you know, that they hoped I should be one day what you are, dear Mrs. Mallerdean ; but she never forgave it, and said I was only fit for a groom's wife. And oh ! Mrs. Mallerdean, it's true, it's all true !"

Startled not only by her unwonted excitement, but by the strange facts that oozed out of her disjointed bemoaning, I was almost speechless.

Agnes looked at me helplessly, and in reply to her look I answered mechanically,

"Not a groom's wife."

"Yes, it's true. I don't know what possessed me. I was always told I was such a beauty, and that I should marry very early ; no one could help seeing me without falling in love with me. And would you believe it, Mrs. Mallerdean, I was thirty-one last birthday, and no one has ever so much as paid me a compliment, let alone offering to marry me. And I could see my sisters were secretly getting vexed ; they would tell me to talk a little more, and question me as to what I said to my partners at balls, or my neighbours at dinner. And they even grew a little impatient with me ; and goodness knows I was dying to be married all the time ! And so you know it came about that when I went riding, which you know I did nearly every day, because sisters said I always looked so well on horseback, though Clarissa has fifty times a better seat, and is madly fond of riding—Well, I questioned Knolls, our groom, about all the gentlemen living in the country ; and I suppose he found out that I was vexed none of them proposed to me. And by degrees he became more familiar. And somehow I did not think it at all odd, but really a pleasant thing, when Knolls, our groom, proposed to me. I did not think then to marry him of course, but I thought to myself, 'I have had a proposal at last !' And he did not say it once, but a great many times. I liked hearing it, though each time of course I refused him. He argued the matter with me just as well as any educated gentleman ; and he gave me a history of many ladies, some of title, some of great wealth, and all very beautiful and virtuous ladies, who had married their servants, and never repented afterwards. I forget all their names, but I will get him to tell you all about them himself. Some of the stories are most entertaining. Well, after a long time, he asking me to marry him day after day, and I refusing, he said to me one day in a passion—

"'Well, Miss, I give it up. You are as 'ard-'earted as a gridiron bridle, and that pulls up the 'ardest-mouthed horse as ever was foaled,

raced, or 'unted. You like to 'ear me a-swearing my 'art away to you, and that's all you care about. Now, I ain't a rhinoceros with a skin of double-thonged leather. I have my feelin's, and they'se uncommon strong. In fact, they is too strong; they've clean runned away. Give me an answer, one way or t'other, for' (and he used a shocking word) 'see if I don't bolt in the morning!'

"Oh, Mrs. Mallerdean, you don't know how I struggled against my fate. Actually he did go away for a week, and I was so low—I felt quite wretched; and when he suddenly appeared again, his feelings stronger than ever, I could not restrain mine. So when he once more proposed to me, in a more ardent way than ever, I said Yes."

Agnes then entered into a long rambling tale of how they got married. They rode so many miles, went in a coach so many miles, and Knolls borrowed some of his sister's clothes for her, and how they got back within an incredibly short time, and how no one found it out.

"But," she added, with a silly giggle, and the strangest, weakest expression in her face—made up of a combined mixture of shame, conceit, and self-satisfaction—"I am going to have a baby—and so it must be found out!"

During this to me dreadful, degrading, almost revolting tale, my mind kept running upon the strangeness of two such cases as Mary Arcot and Agnes Ritson being thrust upon me, one so soon after the other, and I feeling myself totally incapable of advising in either. Moreover, in my horror and disgust of the latter tale, I found myself thinking venially of the first. Yet the first was all sin, and the second all folly. I could not help thinking, indeed feeling sure, wrong as it was, that the pangs inflicted by the folly would be more vehemently felt than those caused by the sin.

Who was to tell the Ritsons?

"You say nothing, Mrs. Mallerdean—you don't know how I suffer."

"Suffer!" I exclaimed; "think of your family."

She began to cry. "I want to go away; I told Knolls I must go, because there would be such scenes, and I can't bear scenes—I never could. But he says I must stay, to make them settle something on me. I was brought up a lady, and I ought to have enough given me to live as a lady. Knolls is very angry about the baby coming, but I am glad. I always wanted to have a child; I thought it would be such an amusement."

Certainly her family had done their best to ruin the intellect of their Beauty, but such extraordinary fatuity overwhelmed me with confusion.

What could be done in such a case? I shrunk as if touched with hot iron, at having anything to do with it. As for excuses, my cheeks flushed scarlet at the bare idea. I hated to look at the side of the room where she sat; that our sex should be thus disgraced!

My little room, but a short time before, was to me as a holy shrine, wherein I offered up once more to God my humble submissive obedience to the fiat of His hand. In the endeavour to obtain a right frame of mind, I had travelled in thought almost to the realms of Heaven, and, in contemplating its delights, its peace, its everlasting rest, I had almost forgotten earth, its sins, its sorrows, its follies.

Since Agnes had told her story it seemed desecrated.

"I am afraid you are angry with me, Mrs. Mallerdean, for what I said about Mr. Mallerdean."

"So far from it, I can think of nothing but your father and sisters; they will die of shame."

"I don't see that at all. It is their own fault. Why did not they do as they promised, and get some one to marry me?"

"You alone are to blame; if you wanted to marry, why did you not exert yourself to please some one?"

"They told me I had only to look pretty. I am sure I did my best, and followed all their advice, and made myself very uncomfortable very often, just to please them."

"They were so fond of you, so proud—"

"They might be proud, but they were not so fond. I was no more to them than a handsome piece of furniture, or a beautiful picture, of which they could boast."

This was too true to deny, and showed that Agnes had some perception, spite of her folly.

"After all, I have done nothing wicked, and so that I can escape Lady Lanton's tongue, I will put up with their anger. They won't be sorry to be rid of me, I know. If you will help me, and break it to them, I feel sure, Mrs. Mallerdean, they will make the best of it. They don't like Lady Lanton any more than I do, and so will enter into any plan that will put a good face on the matter."

"I really cannot do it."

"Oh! yes, please, you don't know how they love you. Let me fetch Knolls in, he perhaps can persuade you; he is only outside the window."

"Oh no, no—not for the world!"

"I would like you to see him—out of his livery; he really looks so like a gentleman——"

"No, no; go now, I will think over all you said, and if you choose to send your two eldest sisters here in the morning, I will try what can be done."

"Thank you, Mrs. Mallerdean. I know you can't think very well of me, and I don't think you ever did, but I am not an ungrateful person. If I get away from this country without people knowing what I have done, I'll never forget your kindness to my dying day. You won't see Knolls?"

"No, no; good night, Agnes; pray leave me."

I let her out of the window, steadily refusing to look at another

figure that came ostentatiously forward to be seen, under pretence of meeting Agnes. I could not help hearing their remarks :

"Well, Hagnus, will she be koind !"

"That she always is, you know, Knolls."

"She has an uncommon character for it."

All that night I could not sleep.

I drew up, first in my mind, then on paper, an assessment of three griefs.

First—The one I was mourning so that night.

Secondly—The sin that must taint a whole life.

Thirdly—The folly that disgraces a family.

For the first I had but to say it was God's will.

My sorrow was not the result of sin, of folly, but rather it was so ordained. There was no bitterness in it, of shame, of remorse ; it was simply the cross that I must bear as He had borne before me.

About this grief there was a sanctification that had an inexpressible charm in it. I was nearer to God. He had pity for me. The hand that had smitten me did it in love. He loved me, and He would reward me for my cross with joy unspeakable. About this my grief there was everything pure, holy, sublime.

With regard to the second—the sin that cannot be expiated but by death—there could be no redeeming point in this world. A girl of so sensitive a nature as Mary Arcot could never for one moment lose the sense of degradation. In all the different relations of life, in the commonest daily acts, in the ordinary doings of one with another, this sin would intervene between the performance of every duty and the pleasure. There could never more be that inestimable feeling of calm joy. The mental pressure of grief like hers forbids happiness and it to dwell together.

With regard to the third grief—that folly which disgraces a family—I was inclined, under the immediate pressure of Agnes Ritson's most disgraceful tale, to think her case the worst.

The mundane part of it was truly the hardest to bear. The Ritsons, rather proud at all times, had considered it necessary to have an idol in their family, whom, Dagon-like, all had to worship. Now, still Dagon-like, this idol was fallen to the ground and broken—so broken that there was no hope of any restoration.

I tried to put myself in the Ritsons' place. I underwent for them an imaginary burst of horror, indignation, despair. My efforts produced no consolation. In vain I sat up hour after hour thinking. It would be a blow to this worthy family, the bitterest they could endure, and of that kind which made submission (so grand a virtue) almost a mockery. They could not even have the satisfaction of thinking they bore it well—for, well or ill, there was nothing but mortification.

Solemnly I prayed to God that, if these two instances of sorrow, seemingly more painful to bear than mine own, had been brought to

my knowledge in mercy, at this particular time, the lesson should not be wasted.

The two elder Miss Ritsons appeared the next day at the earliest possible hour. I know not if they had a suspicion. Rumour will sometimes prophesy, even before it can make known the truth. They were uneasy and prepared for something—but when the frightful truth was really told (how I did it I can hardly tell), their agony of grief was pitiable. They were completely overwhelmed. I made all due allowances for them, but, I must confess, as excitement made them forget discretion, I found my sympathy fast evaporating.

“Oh! Mrs. Mallerdean, what we have done for that girl!”

“We have been slaves to her, Mrs. Mallerdean!”

“We gave up everything for her!”

“We did not have new bonnets this Easter, that she might have a fresh ball-dress!”

“We always did her mending!”

“She did nothing all day but sit and amuse herself!”

“Such a return!”

“A horrible groom!”

“Smelling of the stables!”

“And she had her tempers, though we never told!”

“Obstinacy doesn’t express her, Mrs. Mallerdean!”

“And so ignorant, though we always hid it!”

“Couldn’t spell a bit—we had always to write her letters for her!”

“And to play us this trick!”

“And oh! Lady Lanton!”

“How she will mock at us!”

“I declare I could tear my eyes out!”

“I would have gone out to wash sooner than have this disgrace.”

“We can never show our faces again.”

“Nobody will speak to us more.”

“Yes, I will,” I managed to say clearly, in the midst of this chorus.

“Will you indeed! You are kind. People so respect you, Mrs. Mallerdean, that if you look over it, perhaps others may.”

“Why should you be slighted for the folly of another?”

“But you don’t know the world, Mrs. Mallerdean, they will delight to laugh at us.”

“He can’t say his H’s—the brute!”

I must own there was so much of worldly lament, and so little of fear for the future happiness of their sister, that I listened to this clatter of woe with almost no sympathy.

That good, worthy women, as I knew them to be, should only consider the world’s opinion of their sister’s act, and take no heed to the consequences on their aged father, or the proper means to make the best of it, and endeavour to meet, with some show of wisdom, what was inevitable, surprised me.



Two hours of incessant bewailment only brought a repetition of the above duet.

At last, in a little disgust, feeling that all delicacy was now out of the question, I said :

"Why not all go abroad? The news that Agnes is married can then be sent home. You can tell as much of the truth as you like."

"The very thing ; but we will tell nothing."

As it was not part of my business to dictate to them what they ought to say, I made no answer. But to show how the fear of falling in public estimation operated upon these two kind-hearted, good women, they agreed—before me—all to go abroad, and, after a certain time, to write and say Agnes had a lover, then that she was married. Of course, when they came home, she must remain abroad, her husband supposed to be a foreigner ; but at any rate he must not come back to be recognised as Knolls. His Christian name was Clement. Clement would do very well for a surname. Nothing could be better. They would remain six months abroad, and that would be time to do it all in the most natural manner.

I perceived by this time that I had forgotten one important part of Agnes's confidence to me ; but as I did not know how to bring it on, and was also tired with what had already occurred, I decided to leave Mrs. Knolls to state her anticipations herself.

In the evening I walked over to see old Mr. Ritson, according to promise. I found him the most rational of all the family.

"They spoil her, and must reap the fruits of it. I have seen the young man, and have agreed to give my daughter three hundred a-year. I have recommended him to seek a respectable situation somewhere, or to take a farm, provided it is a hundred miles from my house. I cannot go abroad at my time of life, but I will send part of my family ; more I cannot promise. My poor wife always had her misgivings about the bringing up of Agnes ; but, my dear Mrs. Mallderdean, where there are a number of unmarried women in a family, the clatter is so great, one is glad to let them have their own way, for the sake of peace. For my part, I give the sex credit for a great many virtues, but they are the damdest set of fools, when they put their heads together about themselves, that Providence ever created !"

Mr. Ritson, having exhausted his wrath in the above expletive, never said another word on the matter.

Agnes drew me aside, just as I was leaving, to ask if I had told them all.

I intimated I had left her the gratification of imparting some of her own news, and the sooner she did it the better.

What ensued I know not. The bustle and scurry they were in to get away gave them no time for visiting or talking. They were essentially English people, up to their eyes in English prejudices and habits. In those days languages were not so much considered necessary for education in females as work and the art of confectionery.


Consequently they went abroad a lamentably helpless party, and I felt sure that this sacrifice to the world's opinion would be very dearly bought by them all.

Meantime I prepared, at the request of my father and mother, to visit my childhood's home. I had no pleasure in the thought, but they desired it. It had been a sort of promise, after the first year of my mourning had past.

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## CHAPTER XXXVII.

A LETTER FROM MRS. MALLERDEAN TO LADY HYTHE, DATED  
FROM THEIR OLD HOME.

“ FEEL sure, Marblette, you desire to hear from me. You say to Hythe, ‘Dulce is once more at home, where we were children together; she is not the Dulce of those days, if she does not write to me a full and particular account of everything. I wish to know how much that home is altered; if it be as full of pleasant ways as formerly—what our seven little sisters are like?—to say nothing of that one valued brother, Hugh? How are mine ancient friends, Adam and Eve? Is the pump still running? Are there taws in the nursery; or are the children, impressed by our noble example, too good to warrant their use? Dulce, Dulce, write to tell me everything! You cannot be too minute.’

“I obey, as I ever did, your slightest word, Marblette. Our home is altered. It appears to me to wear an ancient, rather withered look. There is a great increase of building all round it, which does not add to the purity of the atmosphere. Indoors, our mother, as usual, not only makes everything bright by her presence, but absolutely radiant, by the art of arrangement and comfort. Do you remember, Marblette, how we used to think our drawing-room the finest in the world? I think it so still, with our mother sitting in her usual chair, the children playing about the floor, silent, as was the rule in the drawing-room, but supremely happy. The Sienna marble-piece still has its radiated sun, fully developed, whose face, as you and I remember, watched us both, even at opposite ends of the room, and so became an awe, or conscience, to us. We did no wrong in its presence. The children are dear things—two like a Marblette and a Dulce. But there are only five of them. Don't be alarmed, three are turned into young ladies. Emmie and Effie are tall young women—my mother says, with a half-sigh, they are too tall. I know what this means.

“Dear Marblette, look out for wedding gifts. There are two young men perpetually running in upon the most trivial occasions. Effie says Mr. Millar is so nice, and so clever. Emmie declares Mr. Clarke has the kindest heart in the world. But don't imagine that Effie thinks of

being Mrs. Millar, or Emmie Mrs. Clarke. *Tout au contraire*. We understand it is fashionable now to lard all conversation with French. Also that 'tis better to die than be behind the mode. You will perceive I mean to see you again. But, Marblette, our third young lady, how am I to describe her to you? My father looks at her now and then anxiously. He asked me whom I thought she was like. I could not say. Without changing her character in the least, she sometimes looks like you, then me, then, again, she is like no one but herself. I perceive our mother dotes upon Lotty; she has asked me more than once if I do not think her delicate. She certainly is fragile, or rather, I should say, ethereal to look at. I do not think her so delicate, as that she altogether seems to be composed of rare and fine materials. She has the fairest skin, the softest colour, the most wonderful eyes; people say they are black, but in truth they are deepest blue. From out of them you can see a spirit beaming that altogether befits the case in which it lives. I suppose no one has said—no one could say—a harsh word to her. If they did, she would not understand it. Marblette, the fancy seizes me that the soul of the little Dulce, buried before I was born, has come to dwell in Lotty's frame. She is the sweetest thing. I have asked my mother if she may go home with me. She can refuse me nothing, she says, but I saw it would pain her to part with the child, so I said no more; but, after awhile, I shall ask again. The child loves me dearly—loves me as angels love the wretched.

"Hugh is a bookworm. 'If it were not so,' he says, 'he should be altogether smothered in petticoats.' Perhaps it is so. But he aspires to be a sailor, where his learning will little avail him. My father says Hugh is one example out of many that he knows of, whose beginnings by no means fit him for his endings. He has been in the midst of females all his early life, and he voluntarily banishes himself from their society as soon as he has a will, to dwell only with men. This is not complimentary to the female sex. Hugh looks up and says: 'The more manly a man's pursuits, the more fitted he is to be the woman's protector!' I like Hugh. Do not laugh, Marblette. For more than four years I have been almost separated from them all, so I regard their different characters more as a stranger than a sister.

"Poor Adam and Eve! I did not recognise the dear creatures when brought face to face with them. Alas! not face to face—they neither of them now possess even so much as a nose to distinguish that part of their persons. In fact, unconscious of the sacrilegious act, I had spurned them with my foot, deeming the shapeless mass some unsightly stone in my path. I could have kissed them when I found what they were.

"Nurse has grown portly. I am certain she no more remembers ancient days and her love of the taws than she would think I deserved them now.

"'Where are the taws, nurse?' I asked.

“‘Taws, madam?’ she answered, innocently.

“‘Yes, they used to hang here.’

“‘Them bit leather things, madam?—they were no ways an ornament, and we have put ’em by.’

“Marblette, do you blush at this news? I will do it for you. Clearly you and I deserved the taws; our little sisters are better-natured.

“The world grows proud. The nursery has a new fire-place. The Dutch tiles are gone, the whale is no longer rolling Jonah slowly out of his mouth, who is awkwardly balanced on his left leg; the little demons fighting down into the swine’s mouth are all vanished. Jacob has ceased to bless Ephraim and Manasseh, crossing his hands; and the prodigal son has slipt away, without slipping from his awkward position, into the trough of the swine. Black lead and polish are now required to do up the nursery fire—that phenomenon of grimy slush turning into milk-white beauty, is no longer enacted. Even the closet, where poor Bell snatched her untidy meals, has had the blank window filled up with glass, and now adds beauty and lightness to the room. The mice have no longer a retreat behind its dark shutters, and the youngest of our sisters sits there fearlessly, by night as by day.

“Our sisters have butter on their bread. Warm water is put into their milk, which, with a little sugar, gives them the consequence of drinking tea.

“Nurse is proud of all these improvements. As a conscientious Whig, so ought I to be. But in truth, Marblette, I wish you and I were at that age when, huddling on our little duffle dressing-gowns, we surreptitiously lit a candle to look at an eclipse of the moon.

“Bell’s mother came to see me. She detailed to me her grievous suffering from inability to bear anything cold to her stomach.

“‘If my lady (her poor Bell’s favourite among all the childer) would help her just to have a teaspoonful of brandy to her tea, it would be the making of her.’

“My lady would give her flannel, but nothing more.

“‘Well, flannel was no doubt a marcy, and as sich it would be acceptable.’

“Bell’s mother has so far gone on with the times, that now she indulges in the luxury of snuff.

“Nurse Alexander is dead. She dreamed on to the last. Apparently as well as usual, she one night bid her daughter fetch out her death-clothes (long ago prepared) and air them.

“‘I’m soomened. There’ll be a bell tolling this day sennight. On the fifth stroke I’ll be awa.’

“And it was so.

“Subtle mystery of dreams, what art thou? In what chambers of the brain dost thou dwell? And wherefore come to some with the skilled prescience of foreboding, while others are mocked by thy wayward, monstrous, fitful fancies? Marblette, let me know thy

thoughts in dreams ; it seems to me as if I suffered from some belief in them.

"That homely mansion, Earwig Cottage, is no more. This must not surprise you. When I was mistress of it, I felt convinced that a ruder wind than usual might blow it clean away. Sunshine Palace looks less attractive than in former days. A lack of paint, a broken prop, a leg missing to the seat, a cracked table, render it no longer that delightful abode that kings and queens inhabited with pleasure, lords and ladies with delight, and gentlefolks with pride. In truth, Marblette, the vast population increasing all round, the iron foundries, coal pits, and glass-works combined, are gradually destroying vegetation. My father finds 'tis useless to keep up his garden. In a few years I think he must leave the Rectory, its situation will be unbearable.

"And then, Marblette, the remembrances of our childhood will have no realities to keep them fresh. Let us recall them the more often to mind, that we may not lose them.

"Thomson's shop has become a gay mart, wherein you may find any want gratified. From 'clag gum' up to sugared cakes, from farthing candles to best spermaceti. No longer stale gingerbread husbands and wives endure a tottering existence, propped up against the little panes of glass, kept in their places by ancient apples or pale young oranges ; but goodly rows of figs and raisins, bloomy plums, with heaving mountains of shades of sparkling sugars, with towers of white loaves supporting boxes of ornamented macaroni and candied fruits, make the windows a fine sight.

"As for going in with a penny, to say nothing of a halfpenny, and asking for cl-gg-m, I feel sure they would ignore the existence of such a thing. Toffy is now the correct nomenclature.

"The bridge is more crowded than ever. There is no little night-cap-making girl, with the mysterious bundle under her tippet. Marblette ! she has not that bundle now. She is clothed in Heaven with her new body, and it is straight and fair. The women calling out their goods on the bridge are just the same. They do not alter ; they shout, they laugh, they bargain ; they hold out their sweeties to little children such as we were, still the same. The crossing !—well, Marblette, you are safe—you are over the crossing ! I have fallen—I have lost my treasure. Emblem of life was this crossing—we must all endure it ! I thank God you are happily over, my sister ! So let me think no more of this 'Walk in Childhood.'

"All people that see him love my boy. He is already so like his father in his ways, that Lord Oram held him in his arms, and wept over him.

"I did not go there—oh ! no. They were so good as to excuse me. Our father has sold the buff chariot. Methinks, had I been rich I would have bought it. My father says that money does not go so far now as it used to do ; but, in truth, everything is extravagantly dear,

and the times are advancing so fast that people are not content, nay, indeed, they cannot keep the boundary of what their fathers were contented with.

"Philip, who has always looked beyond the times in which we live, has grave fears for England's future. But if she can weather this evil and calamitous time, she will rise superior, and be more firmly established than ever. Thus he hopes on.

"Philip and Sissy came here three days ago with their children. I am glad he is a clergyman. He has that genial hearty nature usually supposed to belong only to squires and favoured heroes among the laity. But he blends his *bonhomie* so well with his more holy character, that both are bettered by it. And his patriotic feelings are just to my taste. His intelligent mind leaps forward to greet the pervert creeds of the day, and rejects or adopts them as they seem worth it.

"I am persuaded, Marblette, that those are happy who have enlightened, sagacious minds to live with. I am no advocate for society of only one sort. Neither do I think it good to live mostly with one sex. One is apt to get conventional.

"As my boy grows up, I will surround him with companions and playfellows, girls and boys. He shall not have to become acquainted with the female sex only when he is seeking a wife. At that dangerous age, a pretty face goes such a long way towards perfection.

"Let me have one of your girls for my daughter—the one that promises to be like you. If my son has any of his mother in him, he will love the little Marblette at first sight.

"Sissy has a little daughter who promises to be prim. Are you not glad? Secretly I encourage the little one to be as precise as possible. Our sister Sissy is not so nimble as she was. Philip tells her she weighs eleven stone. She hath a double chin. She does not use the word 'ought'—she has changed it to 'Philip.' Philip is her master, her husband, the father of her babies, her adviser, her workman, her conscience. Also, he is the children's head nurse, their doctor as well as father. If there was no Philip, I think mother and babies would all collapse. They would become nothing. Thank God for dear Sissy's sake!—Philip grows stouter and stronger the more he has to do.

"Lady Oram paid me a long visit yesterday.

"We talk together of my Peter as if he was beside us.

"Good, worthy mourner, as thou art,' she says to me, 'still it is as a patriot, honest and true, that we lament again and again for him. That will! If thou hadst been in power, Mallerdean would have been true to her colours; of all the sights most abhorrent to my eyes, is the spectacle of a renegade. Never, as long as I have the power to express even an intelligent sign, will I notice or recognise Lady Lanton. When you return home, Dulce, search once more for that will, not for your own benefit, but for the county. Remember your duty towards

your county, as its Queen. When the decent period for mourning is passed, mix once more among your neighbours. You have double work to do, your own and your husband's. It is in the pious, thoughtful homes of England that men are to be raised who will save her in her hour of peril. The homes of English people are in the hands of their women. Let them show their sons what it is to be religious, prudent, refined. No man brought up by a religious educated woman and lady will ever lose the benefits of her teachings.'

"My present influence is so small, dear Lady Oram.'

"It is not. On the contrary, your misfortunes (and the worldly one of losing your position at Mallerdean is counted by the world as the hardest) have given you an interest and favour in the eyes of your neighbours, that is at present paramount. By your prudence, your fortitude, the resolution which nerves you to exert yourself, when your tell-tale face makes the heart ache to see its suffering, you have gained their esteem and sympathy. They long to welcome back, as their Queen, the true mourning widow of Peter Mallerdean—the generous, high-minded inmate of a cottage. Lady Lanton may have supplanted you at Mallerdean, but you will owe it to your own fault alone if you cease to be Queen of the County.'

"I had thought to live quiet.'

"I know you did, but the times will not permit it. After the second anniversary of that fearful day, Dulce, you must nerve up your heart and strength to counteract the evil influence of Lady Lanton.'

"These anniversaries, Lady Oram, drive me back to the very day—the very moment !'

"They do. God has ordained it. The return year by year of birthdays, marriage-days, and mourning-days is good for the soul. Few are so hardened but that the return of the day of their birth brings with it the remembrance that there will be a time when a year will come in which there is no birthday for them. Are they prepared for it? Again, in marriage-days, those that love truly, gladly repeat their vows again, and love on still more fondly as each year proves them still more blest in each other. To those who love not so well, it may be that these anniversaries soften some hardened place in their hearts, and so, opening a spring of kindly feeling, heal wounds that might otherwise have festered and mortified to death. But the mourner!—on such a day a mourner was baptized in sorrow. The ceremony brought her face to face with God. His veil was withdrawn, and she felt herself almost in the invisible world. On each anniversary she withdraws into this holy sanctuary again, and issues therefrom strengthened to perform her work. Do not fear these anniversaries, Dulce. As time mellows the sharpness of your sorrow, you will court them—the only link in this world which connects you with the dead.'

"So, Marblette, pray for your poor Dulce, that she may not moan

away her life. The love of solitude grows on me. I shall shake it off. When I go home you shall see how full my letters will be of business, of life, of cares. Once more, Marblette, I will run after the minutes, and count those lost in which I have not done some good deed. But whatever my fate, that you are happy is the sweetest consolation to your Dulce."

This letter was endorsed by Lady Hythe as being received on the 16th day of March, 1807. To which was added, "I thank God on my knees for this letter—my dearest Dulce is reviving to love and us."

## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

### BATTLE.



HAD not been at home three days before I received a most unexpected visitor in the Countess Harmann. She was admitted before I knew she was at the door. She opened the conversation by saying,

"So you sent for that boy."

She was one of those women who can turn a plain fact into a monstrous falsehood with a plausibility that aggravates in proportion to there being no redress. Such people like contradiction. It opens innumerable opportunities for further stings.

I, therefore, did not answer.

"He is like his father," she continued, watching me intently.

The face of that boy had haunted me ever since I saw it. It was the face of some one I knew. I tried to persuade myself it was the countess herself, but there was in it as little resemblance as to my husband. I replied quietly,

"I suppose so."

"What do you mean?" she said quickly.

"He is like his father."

"Peter Mallerdean?"

"No—he was not his father."

"Oh! is that your opinion? I will take care you are convinced some day. Meantime, I came here for the purpose of asking you for the annuity due to me. I receive it as usual, or publish to the world a tale that will not fit well to the honoured name of Peter Mallerdean."

"You can publish it."

"Are you mad? Is this your boasted love for his memory? Is your mourning a mockery?"

"I do not see that anything that you and I can do would injure the name or memory of my husband."

"You are beside yourself! Think of the tale I can tell, and then consider what people will say of him afterwards."



"I think the Countess Harmann forgets that a good name honourably gained cannot be lost by a false tongue. Bethink you for a moment of the estimation in which you are held by the world. I but remind you of it to close this conversation. Should this fail to convince you—know that I am not to be frightened. Your good name is more necessary to you living, than Peter Mallerdean's to him dead."

She turned pale, more with anger than any other feeling. I continued:

"You ought to know—I feel sure you do know—that I have scarcely my proper rights from Lady Lanton. Fortunately my wants are simple. But, should my husband's will be found, and I assume the position Lady Lanton occupies, and which ought now to be mine, still you need seek nothing at my hands. Not if I possessed countless wealth should you have anything from me as a right, though I might throw you gold as I would to a beggar."

"Proud woman! more haughty now than in those hateful days of triumph when you occupied the place that ought to have been mine! Proud woman; you shall live to repent these words! If I sacrifice character, name, friends, fortune, I will be revenged!"

These words had a ring of intimidation in them that might have frightened me; but knowing the weakness and turpitude of her character, it seemed that, having left herself no other weapon than words, she used them as people do in a passion.

She left me.

In the evening I had a visit from Lady Lanton.

"I understand," she said, "that Beaume has again begun to pay attentions to you. I have come to say that you have my consent to marry him, and I will use my influence to obtain him a bishopric."

"Do not say such things," I answered; "Peter will not like it."

"What do you mean?" she exclaimed, starting up, and looking round appalled.

"Peter sees you and hears you. If I did not think he was near me, night and day, I could not drag on this miserable existence."

"You are insane!" she exclaimed.

As she uttered these words, Lady Joyce made her appearance. With a flush upon her cheeks, she came towards me and placed herself between me and Lady Lanton.

"Oh! you are her keeper, are you? But you need not wait. I came on a kind errand—very kind. I give her permission to marry Beaume. She may marry as soon as she likes, provided she takes herself off."

Her fury was ungovernable.

We neither of us spoke. For my part, I was silent from prudence. No matter what I had said, it would but have inflamed her more.

After a while she began again:

"I desired Beaume to follow me; I requested he would come prepared to satisfy me as regarded his arrangements."

"Mr. Beaume has already settled them with me," said Lady Joyce.

"You! has he taken you into his confidence?"

"Yes, madam; this morning he came to tell me of his intentions, and this afternoon he accompanied me here to announce to Mrs. Malterdean his intended marriage with Miss Clarissa Ritson."

"You!—you have done this! Think not that I shall forget this, Lady Joyce! I know your wishes—you desire to mix with the county families! You! a milliner's apprentice! Go back to your proper sphere——"

But I care not to repeat more.

When we were free from her, and alone, I own that I was almost wearied out. Nothing but the happiness resulting from the piece of news regarding Mr. Beaume enabled me to fight against the anger and indignation that oppressed me.

Lady Joyce soothed me with her account of how it had been brought about.

"I will not vex you, dear madam, by telling you at how early a period Lady Lanton began to speak to Mr. Beaume upon this extravagant crotchet of hers. I will do him the justice to say he was really shocked. He said the bare thought was so great an insult to you in every way, that he dared hardly lift his eyes to your face. From the very first moment of Lady Lanton's preposterous mania, he came to me for advice as to how he should so act as to repel the slightest rumour."

At this instant I suddenly recollected the power of revenge that I had in my hands—the will. I prayed Lady Joyce to excuse my absence for a moment, while I ran to get the "Work of Art," and at least comfort myself by looking on the outside of that case which contained so powerful an antidote to all my trouble within. I was not able to return to Lady Joyce in a moment, as I expected. Buffy's elaborate piece of work was not in its usual place—I looked above, below, all round, everywhere! I rang the bell and asked for it. No one had seen it for a length of time.

The blood ran hotly through my veins as I thought of the folly that made me keep so precious a thing in such an insecure place.

It was seldom I was vexed, or, rather, showed my vexation—I lived as one who had not a thought left to waste twice upon the little ills of life. But now, for the first time, my servants saw a flash of impatience on my face, and heard a hasty, peremptory order from my lips. They ran hither and thither, scared by this unusual sight.

All the time I felt the necessity to conceal the real dismay and agitation in my heart. That this ugly little box should be of any more consequence to me than that it was the work of my dear adopted boy Buffy, must not be shewn. I therefore desired it might be found, and brought to me; while I returned to Lady Joyce.

The flush of sudden fear had given place to an unusual pallor—

even for me. I had much ado to refrain from confiding in Lady Joyce—I was so greatly dismayed. She saw there was something the matter, but, as was her wont, took no further notice than giving me my salts.

Before five minutes had elapsed, I heard the quick feet of my little son coming. He ran hastily in, and flying to my arms, said,

“Buffy said the box was mine.”

“Did he, darling?”

“Yes, and that boy asked for it—the boy called Adrian. I thought it was proper, as a visitor, that I should give him all he desired. So he took it away with him.”

I hid my face in his curls, that neither he nor Lady Joyce might see the consternation expressed in it.

“Are you grieved, mother?”

“A little, love.”

“I shall try and make you another.”

“Thanks, my boy; now run back to your play, Will you continue your story, dear Lady Joyce?”

She obeyed me.

“I had been long anxious for Mr. Beaume to marry; I felt sure it was the only thing to cure him of the vanity that clouded over his really good qualities. He took more home-truths from me than most people, because my antecedents were even lower than his own. I had too high an opinion of Clarissa to force her on the notice of any man, but after giving it as my opinion that the most effectual means to balk Lady Lanton was to marry, I took care to bring them a good deal together.

“When her sisters went away with that unfortunate Agnes, I undertook to assist Clarissa in all the parish duties they had begun. This gave me many opportunities of making him better known to her than before; for she is a girl of wonderful prudence and depth of thinking. She would not give her heart where she had no respect. I can assure you, my dear Mrs. Mallerdean, I have had a very anxious winter; for poor Beaume was really in love, and fully aware of the value of the heart on which he seemed to make so little impression, while she was so chary of showing the least liking for his society, and seemed to have no pleasure beyond the affections of her family. And all the while I knew that the poor Ritsons would greet the news as a full and ample balm for the cure of the sad wound Agnes had inflicted on the family honour. In addition to this, was my ardent desire to put an end to Lady Lanton’s wicked thoughts—for wicked they were. By some means she became aware of my counteracting influence; and she knew that, whilst she tried to play upon that weakness and vanity which are really the greatest blots in Mr. Beaume’s character, I was endeavouring to urge him to an independent and manly decision. Love and I together succeeded. You heard her acknowledge my triumph—I call it my triumph. She sent for him this morning, saying

there must be no more shilly-shallying. She should come down to you, dear lady, and prepare you. He was to arrive directly after, and clench the matter. She would not permit him to make the slightest remonstrance, or even to utter a word. So he thought his best act, both towards you and himself, was to go straight to Clarissa and offer his hand. I am glad to say she is wholly without nonsense. The result was a sincere interest in his favour, which she felt certain only required the assurance of his affection to ripen into love. They came to me at once, Clarissa looked quite pretty, and he was as lover-like as you would wish to see. Too lover-like, for he forgot to tell me of Lady Lanton's intentions until I saw the carriage passing through the park. I came to you as quickly as I could, and can only regret that I was not here in time to prevent the annoyance you have suffered. The sight of the Ritson family will make amends, I hope."

"It shall, dear Lady Joyce—indeed, it does already. I am not so disturbed about Lady Lanton as that I have lost——"

"This box," she said, as I paused.

"It contained a precious thing. I had no right to keep it there."

"Was the box locked?"

"Yes, and it was also covered with pictures, pasted on. It looked like a block of wood."

"Perhaps the boy to whom little Peter gave it still considers it a block of wood."

"Pray Heaven he may!"

"You want it back. Can it be written for?"

"No, that would look strange, as if it was important. I wish no interest to be attached to it, if possible."

"Can I go?—can I send?"

"Dear Lady Joyce, if you would—and without seeking to know more."

"For you, I am blind, deaf, dumb. Give me the direction of the house where it may now be found, and I will bring it back to you untouched."

"You relieve me greatly. Here it is, the Rev. Mr. Cator; a boy named Adrian Levassee lives with him as pupil. Say I knew not my little son had given the box—that it shall be returned if he values it—but in truth I need not advise you. Only I shall not be happy until I have it again in my possession."

"You shall not be one moment longer unhappy than I can help. I shall cover my departure by announcing my intention to go to town, ostensibly regarding Clarissa's trousseau. From thence I shall go down to Maidenhead, and execute this business, after which I will write to you. You will cease to be unhappy if you know it is in my possession."

"Most true—to know that will suffice me. I am already happier. Let us go down to Mr. Beaume, that I may offer him my congratulations; afterwards we will go to the Ritsons, and on the way I will give

you my charges as to a wedding present, which you must procure for me in town."

I never liked Mr. Beaume better than when he was receiving my felicitations. For once he forgot to act a part, and was natural. The effect was so good, he was apparently as much pleased with himself as we were.

As for the Ritsons, they were tearfully happy. In spite of all our care to keep the secret, sufficient of the true facts about the marriage of Agnes had transpired to give rise to gossip which had been very hard to bear. That Mr. Beaume should come forward when the family were under a cloud, entitled him to be welcomed gratefully as a brother.

Old Mr. Ritson alone appeared fully aware of the value of the wife he was giving Mr. Beaume. "It does not become a father, sir, to praise his own child; but if she leaves me to go to you, you are the only man in the world I shall envy."

Dear Clarissa, she well deserved her father's praise.

## CHAPTER XXXIX.

### PERPLEXITIES.



WHEN I was once more at home, my thoughts reverted again to the rashness and folly which had let me leave that precious document in so precarious a place.

It would appear that, having decided not to make use of it, I had not cared for it.

Now that it was gone, it was of more value to me than all the world besides. And every moment that passed while it was out of my possession seemed to enhance the importance of its recovery. It was a link between me and the dead.

As if to smite me still more with regret for that fatal vow, I had a long visit from Lord and Lady Harpendale two days after Lady Joyce went to town.

They bewailed the degraded condition of Mallerdean.

"Were it feasible," said Lord Harpendale, "I should ransack the house for the lost will. I have gleaned enough from the servants, and Mr. Allen, to know that there was a suspicious burning of something one night in Sir Brough's room. Oh, if I could only bring it home to her, we might save the county."

I felt very conscious as I answered him, and could not help secretly arguing with myself as to whether it was right to sacrifice the principles of the county to save the good name of a private individual. But I said—

"It is only for a time, Lord Harpendale; there never was a truer Whig than this little fellow, and he is now six years old."

"Yes, that you can do; you can educate him properly, but meantime we are demoralized. For thirty-six years we have sent a Whig member to Parliament, and look at us now. Represented by a man whose private character is as obnoxious to me as his public one. I don't believe he has any public spirit. He thinks of nothing but himself."

"Does Lady Lanton know how reprehensible he is, and how much she damages her own character by admitting the Countess Harmann and Colonel Moffat to Mallerdean?"

"I do not know, Lady Harpendale," I answered; "but if I am asked my opinion, I think she has not the slightest idea. I need not hide from you that her temper is her great fault; but I think she is singularly free from what I suppose you would term vice."

"But is there no one to tell her that these two people are not the proper associates for a woman who has no legal protector?—for I presume Sir Brough continues as usual."

"No, he is much worse, and has had another stroke. Buffy is sent for to be with him, as he alone can manage him."

"Buffy is of a good age now—fifteen or thereabouts—cannot he say something to his mother?"

"He will say it, if he thinks it needful. But the difficulty with Lady Lanton is, she neither sees nor believes any ill of those she likes; while those who incur her anger are objects of the deepest abhorrence."

"I wish, Mrs. Mallerdean, you had disputed the will. I feel sure the law would have decided in your favour, or at all events have restrained Lady Lanton in some measure."

I dared not reply to this. How wicked I seemed to myself, to have thought only of the private ends to be gained, and not of the public claims lost by the suppression of my husband's will.

"But 'tis useless wasting time in idle regrets. We must bestir ourselves. You will come to us, Mrs. Mallerdean, for the Assizes, and make your appearance among your subjects as Queen at the ball. Naturally you shrink, but, believe me, you will be doing what would have pleased Peter. As a true patriot, you must labour for the Whig cause. Once 'tis known that you are as firm as ever, and that little Peter is being brought up as a staunch Whig, people will then have some hold to cling to."

"I think you must oblige us, my dear," continued Lady Harpendale; "it is now almost three years since you have been in seclusion, and whilst every one believes that you will be a mourner all your life, still that life must not be wasted only in mourning. You have work to do."

"And another thing, Mrs. Mallerdean, it is time you appeared amongst us, to put an end to the various reports spreading all over

the country. I was told only yesterday that you were quite insane, and fancied that our poor dear Peter was always by your side."

I told them what I considered the origin of this report, it being but two days ago since I had alarmed Lady Lanton by saying that her brother would not like to hear her say such words to me.

"No doubt she has taken advantage of this. She was, nevertheless, with Ardmore yesterday, negotiating for a marriage between you and Moffat, who is now his heir, with a view to amalgamating the two great political heads. I must do my friend the Marquis the justice to say that he was properly shocked. He told me himself that he was disgusted with the audacity of the woman. And he saw through her, too. There was nothing political in her intention—all her desire is to get Mrs. Mallerdean away from where she is, and to take from her, no matter how, the name of Mallerdean. This is her aim, her scheme; to effect this I believe she would forfeit every other good she possessed."

"But the future Mrs. Moffat will become Countess of Ardmore."

"She may be a duchess, and that would be better in the eyes of Lady Lanton than that she should remain Mrs. Mallerdean of Mallerdean. There is no accounting for whims. Every one has their private insanity."

"All this time, my lord, we are lacerating the tender heart of our poor Dulce."

"No, I am something comforted at learning the depth of Lady Lanton's wishes, and greatly so by the just appreciation Lord Ardmore has of Peter Mallerdean's widow."

"True, my dear—he told me himself the reply he gave Lady Lanton, 'Go home, madam, and look in your sister's face. There you will see her answer and mine to your proposal. Edward Moffat is my heir; fate has accorded him that, but he will never gain for his wife such a woman as Mrs. Mallerdean.'"

After they were gone I wrote to my mother, to beg her to let me have my little sister Lotty, now seventeen years old, to go out with me. I argued that it would be a sad lonely time for me, and very trying, but that if I had such a dear little pretty thing to take out and chaperon, it would be some mitigation of my pangs.

Also that evening Buffy ran down to see me, for the first time since his return. I then told him of the untoward fate of the "Work of Art," and how Lady Joyce had gone in search of it, but how she did not know the real value of its contents.

"But she will guess, Mother Hubbard; the mere fact of your being troubled about such an apparent trifle, troubled as you are about nothing, will tell her, especially as the report is ever getting up that the will is heard of. My father's servant is always hinting to me what a burning there was one night in Sir Brough's room."

"Altogether, Buffy, I think you and I behaved wrong at that time."

"I am certain of it, Mother Hubbard, and, for that reason, I bear with 'my lady' as I do. I almost begin to hope that Lady Joyce will be necessitated to discover the will. She will take no vow regarding its suppression, I am certain."

"No, Buffy, yet she will scarcely like to let it be known, I knew of its existence, and did not produce it. Political feelings are now so bitter and strong, I shall hardly be forgiven."

"But, mother, we did not expect 'my lady' to turn out such a renegade after the fashion she has done. That has astonished me in her more than anything."

"I think it arises from this, Buffy. She has never been much loved except by her brother, and that she considered only natural. Colonel Moffat toadies her, and the Countess Harmann does the same in a still more flagrant manner. She takes this for genuine admiration and esteem on his side, and true love on hers. She has tasted what it is to be loved, and likes it. Her misfortune is that she has had so little of it, that she does not know true from false."

"Do you think, then, that if my father died she would marry 'Moppet?'" exclaimed Buffy, in direst disgust.

"Oh! no, my dear Buffy, she wants him to marry me. Your mother is wholly free from anything like the frailties of Lady Harmann; and it is because she is so unconscious of such evil, that she likes them both so much. She is a singular character. Her ill-humours, her strange acts, seem to do more harm, create greater scandal, and give her a worse name than if she indulged in all the wickedness of the other two."

"If one could only show them up," murmured Buffy.

I was silent; my thoughts ran on what Lady Lanton would say if she knew the Countess Harmann's real secret. I felt persuaded she would give her up at once. There was a package. I knew it well. It was that history. I had been shewn it, in a certain drawer, long ago. It was endorsed, "Matters concerning my ward, Adrian Levassue."

Had Lady Lanton ever stumbled across it, as she looked over the papers necessary for the carrying out of her duties at Mallerdean? Should I tell her of it? That would be useless. According to the infatuation that governed her, she would tell the Countess at once, and she would possess herself of the packet, only to destroy it.

Could I gain possession of it?

How I shuddered!

Never had I been there—never had I seen that archway, that stone. I should know it—the very spot. Oh! no, no, let the world go on, let the Countess Harmann flourish, let secrets be destroyed; but not—not that I should see that scene again.

And was it ever to be so? Should I never again enter Mallerdean House, which, in times to come, when I should be still a young woman, would be my son's home?



I wished I might never do so.

Was this the secret reason why I cared not to produce the will? I felt that it was.

It must be conquered.

Time had granted me the year I craved to get acquainted with my sorrow. Sorrow had enclosed me as a heavy, misshapen, unsightly garment. At the end of the year it had worn itself to my shape—it clung to me as if it grew on me. And now it was as part of myself. No longer the grim token of a grief that nothing earthly could assuage, it had folded itself out of sight, but it was there. I could no more be separated from it than from the tissues that covered my bones. I and my sorrow had become acquainted. We were bosom friends—we were bed-fellows. We ate and drank together, were sick together, we knew we should die together. We clung to each other the more because the world went on marrying and giving in marriage, making money and spending money, eating and drinking, laughing and mourning, and all as if we had never been. It had not forgotten me, because I was there before it; but it no longer remembered my sorrow. Other sorrows had come and gone—other griefs had risen and floated away like mists. They supposed mine had done the same. But I knew better. It lay there over my heart, within the wells of my eyes, rising ever to my lips, though never spoken—dwelling in every secret corner of the brain. I had had a husband; God took him. Now sorrow and I were married, never to be parted until death restored me to him.

When I fell into moods such as this, it was the custom of those who knew me to leave me to myself. So when I woke up again to the visible world, I was alone; Buffy had gone.

He appeared the next day with Lady Joyce's promised letter.

We both exclaimed, with really something like joy (it could be nothing else), when we read at the top "Success!"

This was the letter:

"MY DEAR MADAM,—I left town very early this morning, driving in my own coach the first twenty miles. I then hired a little chaise with two horses, and proceeded to the Rev. Mr. Cator's, where I arrived a little after noon. Upon knocking for admittance, a pale, sickly-looking lady came to the door. She seemed nervous and hurried. I alighted, and requested that the driver might refresh his horses with a little hay and water. To which she replied, he could get that at the village, a hundred yards down the road. So I bid him go, and return in half an hour, which did not please him. But you know I can be peremptory. I then put on as cheerful an air as I could, and followed the lady into a dim little dusty parlour, where she received me after so timid a fashion she had not the courage to bid me sit down. I therefore did so without invitation, and began at once to say that I merely called to inquire after the health and well-being of Master Levassue.

"Upon which she seemed greatly relieved, and entertained me with a long account of his virtues and goodness, and the pains Mr. Cator took with him. I then asked if they took more pupils than one, which seemed to inspirit her, and, after some hesitation, she showed me the house, and the capabilities it possessed of holding two or three pupils, on the same terms as Master Levassue ; though, indeed, if they were brothers, Mr. Cator might take them for less.

"I was sorry to mislead the poor lady, who evidently seems oppressed by that sad thing, poverty. But I must tell you she previously informed me that Mr. Cator and his pupil had gone to spend the day with a friend, and she did not expect them home for some hours.

"As she saw, or fancied she saw, by my manner and questions, visions of additional pupils, she warmed towards me, as you might see a poor half-starved dog warm towards a kind word.

"Master Levassue's room was certainly the most comfortable in the house ; but nowhere could I see a sign of what I came for. A murmur of voices led me to think there were children near, and, after some persuasion, she let me see some poor little pale girls, and one sick boy lying on a couch, in a small, close room at the back of the house. The girls were all stitching hard, and the boy was painting. I sat down amongst them, and made much of the boy. He soon told me he sold pictures. I asked him to let me buy some ; and I said a few words, apparently simple ones, but they were like sugar to him. The lady now urged me to stay with them awhile, and one of the girls offered to run down to the village, and delay the coming of the chaise. This was done, and though I had now been at the house an hour, not a sign did I see of the 'Work of Art.'

"During the temporary absence of Mrs. Cator, who left the room to get me something to eat, I questioned these children regarding Master Levassue. They all seemed to dislike him. I asked about the box. After awhile, one of the girls recollected his bringing it home, and that it was often seen in his room afterwards. I begged her to try and find it for me. She answered she might not leave her work, she had so much to do before her father returned.

"My dear lady, I fear this pale mother and her sickly children could tell a sad tale. If you have it in your power to send any sum to this family, let not this nightmare of a Master Levassue swallow it all up. Let the poor nervous wife, and her overworked, sad children, take their fair share.

"I gave the girl a guinea, and said, 'Find the box for me, and that is yours.' Astonished, she rose and vanished. After a few minutes her mother entered, and I could see by her face the girl had told her.

"I thought it best then to tell her the truth. Of this poor miserable pale woman, and her sad children, I could have no fear.

"'See, madam, I am ready to give that for the box,' I said.

"'And Master Levassue does not care now for it,' she murmured, as she gazed at the five guineas I placed before her; 'and this will buy my poor John some wine.'

"'Be quick, madam,' I said. 'Mr. Cator might return.'

"She hurriedly snatched up the money, and calling the children to help her, went in search of the box.

"Dear Mrs. Mallerdean, I am sorry to tell you it has been broken open. I presume the contents have not been disturbed, for I saw within it a roll of parchment, which appeared much scorched.

"It was found in a box of Master Levassue's, carefully concealed. I think I saw his own name on the parchment. If he should know or guess?

"I asked his character. As I said before, none of them like him. He is now nearly sixteen or seventeen years of age. What I had to eat, the little ones told me, was meant for his dinner. Their wistful eyes were too much for me; I would rather never dine again than think I took from these poor children the morsel to allay their hunger. I divided it among them. He is mean and avaricious—but withal a fool. Mr. Cator makes much of him, to keep him in good humour, as the amount of his allowance is, I should say, all they have to live on, but what the children make by their work. Master Levassue tries to make them spend wholly upon him the two hundred pounds a year. This is his sole employment, from morning to night. He calculates the cost of everything; but I will tell you all when I return. I was anxious to get away with my prize ere he and Mr. Cator returned. Dear madam, I thought it safer to leave the 'Work of Art' behind. We placed it again where we found it. Dear little Peter would ill brook the feeling that his gift had been taken from the person to whom he gave it. We must not hurt his feelings as a man of honour and a gentleman. But more than all, this Master Levassue must continue to suppose the 'Work of Art' contains still what he seems to prize. Dear madam, I sealed up the scorched parchment, and it shall be delivered to you intact. Meantime my heart is very glad, and I sing with happiness. Nevertheless no one shall hear my song but you.

"I got safe away—walking down to the village inn for my chaise. There I learned sadder news still, but the woman of the little inn promised to stand my friend. I think those pale little children, with the still paler mother, shall dine on turkey this Christmas. And I feel sure the poor boy shall always have a sale for his pictures. Thank you, madam, dear and honoured. You have given me a good and happy task to do—that is, through you it has been offered me. I cease to lament I am childless, when I see in the world so many who are orphans wanting 'mother's' gifts.

"Your faithful and affectionate servant,

"MARGARET JOYCE."

## CHAPTER XL.

## GATHERING CLOUDS.



UFFY and I looked sadly at each other.

"It is discovered!" said he.

"Lady Joyce will keep the secret as carefully as ourselves," I answered.

"How did that boy's name happen to be mentioned in Uncle Peter's will?"

"He was his ward—he must have added some directions about him in his own handwriting, for certainly nothing was said of him in the copy Mr. Allen showed us."

"What sort of boy is he, Mother Hubbard?"

"I thought him childish and gauche; scarcely as wise as my little son, though he was ten years older."

"I think Mr. Cator must be a bad man."

"Your Uncle thought well of him. He has experienced some loss—he wants money; or he has been improvident, and the shifts of poverty have deteriorated his character. Meantime, Buffy, keep a good heart. If that boy had the sense to understand anything of the document, or why his name should be written on it, he would have shown it to Mr. Cator or a lawyer. You may rest assured he knows nothing of its value."

"Why did he hide it?"

"That is strange, certainly; but we can do nothing—we must rest quiet."

"Please to tell Mr. Courtenaye—it is no longer of use to keep our vow."

"I cannot tell him, Buffy, as I should not like to mix him up in a matter where I am so much to blame."

"Then tell Mr. Carne."

"No, I wish to tell none of my own people."

"I suppose you are right. Will you let me tell Lord Harpendale?"

"Dear Buffy, he is so angry with your mother, we cannot hope that he will be the least forbearing. Let us wait awhile. I have a strong opinion of Lady Joyce's good sense—she will perhaps suggest some good plan. But if you wish to know my real opinion, it is that I should tell your mother, and her only."

"Of course, that is the right thing. Therefore, my Mother Hubbard, as we made one vow together, let us absolve each other of it, and permit either one, in case of emergency, to tell 'my lady.' She is hard of heart, and a very Gorgon for temper, but she is not a wicked woman. Who knows but the news may do her good?"

Buffy's face lightened up at this idea with a radiance of happiness.

I kissed him tenderly between the eyes, as if to endorse an amen to the hopeful prayer that I knew he was speaking from his heart. This slight, fragile boy of sixteen commanded a respect from me that a hero might demand. He was so unerringly true and good in all his conceptions.

Upon the same evening of her return home, Lady Joyce brought me (tired as she was) with her own hand the sealed packet.

"To-morrow, dear madam, I shall come here with a petition. Enclose this treasure in any safe casket you like—lock it, and seal it with your seal. But give it into my keeping."

I promised I would think over her request ; on reflection, I thought it a wise and kind offer on her part, but I could not make up my mind to do it. She would accept from me none of the charges of her journey. She said she owed me a debt—that our situations of her reversed. I knew she referred to Mrs. Cator and her children. Lady Joyce loved to find out objects upon whom to pour all the wealth of her generous nature.

It would seem that Mr. Cator had always been an improvident man. He was well thought of at college, in society ; he had a certain degree of cleverness, which made him liked wherever he went—but he was utterly without strength of character.

When a living was given him, he immediately plunged into all the expense of building a new rectory on so costly a scale that the proceeds of his living had to be sequestered for many years to pay for it, and that before it was wholly roofed in. And when finished he had no means to furnish it, nor to live in it.

His wife was a meek, amiable creature, unable to stem the tide of his foolish and useless extravagances. They had gone on from bad to worse, until the two hundred a-year they received from Master Levassue, was all they had to depend upon.

His whims and tempers were almost unbearable ; but they humoured him, for fear he should insist upon leaving so comfortless a dwelling. This, and much more to the same effect, accounted for the deplorable condition of Mrs. Cator and her children.

After Lady Joyce had left me, with slow and trembling fingers I opened the sealed packet, and prepared to gaze upon that which had borne the impress of my husband's living hand—which was the witness of his loving faith in me—which bore his signature on every page. That signature he was never to write again, and I was not twenty-six years old.

Slow, weary, halting Time !

That was a night of vigils for me. Then I made confession to God and him, for the guilty error of suppressing his last will and command ; and promised as atonement that I would seize the first rightful opportunity of carrying out the fulfilment of his wishes. I would take as my proper punishment the blame of what I had done, and accept

patiently all the harassing and painful trials which would beset the endeavour to retrieve my fault.

I prayed for help and guidance as to the way in which I should proceed, and also that Lady Lanton's eyes might be opened to the real character of her dearest friend. I prayed that in nothing I might be actuated by ill-feeling or malice. I prayed that I might be able to appeal to the good qualities which, as a Mallerdean, she inherited from her race.

Finally, I copied out that short codicil (all the clear and firm characters appearing in darker, more distinct colours from the action of the fire) relative to the boy—Adrian Levassue.

"I bequeath to my wife's (Dulce Mallerdean) care a boy named Adrian Levassue. To her judgment and discretion I leave his welfare in every respect, and entrust her with the charge of putting him out in the world. But in regard of a certain nobleness of disposition in my wife, that would lead her to do more for this boy than I feel his birth warrants, I limit the sum to be spent on him to two hundred a-year annuity, or three thousand pounds paid down, in lieu of all other and any claims whatsoever. And if my wife should, by reason of ill-will, or scandal, or other discomfiture, arising out of this codicil, incur trouble or vexation, all moneys, or annuities, or further interest in Adrian Levassue, are to cease from that moment, and papers endorsed 'Matters concerning Adrian Levassue,' which will be found in the second left-hand draw of my escritoire, are to be read by any two friends of mine whom she, my wife, shall choose to select. And furthermore——" but here the scorching of the fire had done its worst work. Just at this place, for two or three pages, the parchment was burnt through.

Then I kissed his dear name, every word he had written, and, with a heart almost as shattered with grief as when I lay on his coffin, I proceeded to enclose it in some safe covering.

For that purpose I took a piece of old Indian silk, and sewed it up carefully, so that it looked like a roll on which to wind lace. I placed it in my work-table. By this time it was almost daylight, and I hurried into bed for a short space, that it might not be seen I had been up all night.

It was about this time that I received my father and mother's consent to have little Lotty. My dear father was to bring her to me. Dulce Domum was too small to hold more company than these two at a time.

When I had to write to Marblette, and tell her that my father was with me, and had brought the pretty Lotty, I had also to tell her of a letter my mother wrote to me, sending it by them. In this she said, "her heart much misgave her sending the child, though it was to me, who would have every care for her. But in truth, there was a something wanting in Lotty's organisation, that no one, not even her father, had hitherto discovered.

"When a little mere baby," wrote my mother, "the child struck me as unlike any other that I had ever seen. She had an instant perception of love when so young that I am almost afraid to say her age. At the same time she has not, and never had, the consciousness of the meaning of anger, fear, sin, or evil. Neither can I make her understand them—she smiles at the expression of anger, as if it was some play. She listens, but is wholly unable to understand what I mean by fear. There is some defect in her brain or mind, which forbids her to reason. Fortunately all her impulses are, I may say, angelic. No eye but her mother's has noted this want—this flaw, for it is such—in her. As long as she was a child there was nothing to fear. But now, when her mind is gradually opening, her perceptions enlarging, it is not to be hidden longer that she sees, looks at, judges things as pictures presented to her eye. They please her, or don't please her, and she has no reason to give for either. I shall not tell her father of my suspicions, until the experiment has been tried of leading altogether a new life. I shall trust to you, my Dulce, to watch her, and to supply that sense that is wanting in her, though I know not how to call it a want, since hitherto all people love and admire her. It is for herself I fear."

"Is not this strange," wrote I to Marblette, "this pretty faultless creature, like a little Una, not having found her soul. Or is it, as I said, the spirit of the little dead Dulce come to visit us on earth and who, having brought with her from Heaven her Heaven's nature, is incapable of believing in or thinking evil? It will be something for me to do, to awaken in the little sweet thing a reasoning power. I have sent up to Mallerdean for my clothes and jewels, long locked up. It will please me to dress her in soft muslin and pearls. I have stores there of fine things, if I may but have them down."

I did not tell Marblette the trouble I had to get them. I was too poor to buy Lotty the pretty dresses I wished her to wear, especially when I had so many at Mallerdean unused. But I had hard work to obtain them. I was bid to come for what I wanted myself. This Lady Lanton knew I would not do. Escorted by Buffy, to whom I gave great charges, Lotty went up there as my deputy, taking the keys with her.

Buffy understood, without my telling him, that he had a responsibility of an unusual kind.

When they returned, I was anxiously waiting them (my dear father had gone home). Lotty looked very bright and smiling. She was charmed with the great house, all but one thing.

"What was that?" I asked.

"I saw no Dulce," she replied. "But here is the list," she went on; "see if we have done your bidding rightly."

Satisfied of this, she went and sat at the window, musing; a sign with her of some mental emotion—the opening of some new idea.

I took Buffy into the next room, and asked him how they had sped

"In truth, Mother Hubbard, they were much startled, not only by her appearance, but her manners. She went into the room without a fear; she walked up to 'my lady,' looked at her, and then put up her face to be kissed; and, wonderful to relate, 'my lady' did kiss her. She then said, with that little flute-like voice—

"'We have come for Dulce's things; here is the list, and here are the keys—they are all for me. I am going visiting with her, and to a ball—my first ball.'

"She chatted thus confidently to 'my lady;' but when the Countess came forward and tried to gain her attention, she did not seem to see her. Even when 'my lady' said, 'The Countess speaks to you,' she took no notice.

"'Come,' she said to 'my lady,' in such a sweet, coaxing way I did not wonder my mother did as she asked her; 'come—help me to get Dulce's pretty things—they are for me, you know.'

"When they returned, she chattered as innocently as ever; and then, reminded by me, prepared to return home. Again she put up her cheek for 'my lady' to kiss, and again took no notice of the Countess.

"'You must wish that lady good-bye,' said my mother.

"'What lady?' asked Lotty, as in surprise. 'I see no lady;' and straightway walked out of the room.

"A servant is bringing all the things down. Is there not something strange in this little Lotty of yours, Mother Hubbard?"

"What makes you think so, Buffy?"

"I think her conduct to Countess Harmann odd, to say nothing of taking a fancy to 'my lady.' But coming home, we met Colonel Moffat on horseback. He pulled up when he saw us, and dismounted when he perceived Lotty's prettiness. She flushed scarlet, and came round to my other side; and when he would, in his free, impudent way, take hold of her hand—he took her for a child, I believe—

"'Mount your horse, sir,' she said, with the dignity of a woman twice her age, 'and go on your way.'

He obeyed her. When he was gone she stopped, and often looked back at him. Finally, Mother Hubbard, she said to me,

"'Do you think that man will ever become an archangel?'

"'No,' I answered; 'he is not good enough.'

"'Not good enough,' she repeated; 'not good enough?'

"She is very young, Buffy, and I do not think has given up her childish ways yet. I remember not being much wiser."

Two or three days after this, Buffy brought down an invitation from Lady Lanton for Lotty to spend the day at Mallerdean House.

She was very eager to go; and again, under Buffy's charge, I sent her. She came back as happy as before, even more so.

Her first words were:

"I am engaged my first dance at my first ball. Buffy says Colonel Moffat is not good—but I think him so. He is very kind to me."



Buffy told me that she had been full of life and animation, and had done nothing at all odd, except still refusing to exchange any civilities with the Countess. When asked point-blank why she did not like her as well as Lady Lanton, she replied carelessly, just as a child might say,

"Oh! you don't like me, so I don't like you."

"My lady," continued Buffy, "is pleased with her—she cannot resist the prettiness of her ways; and as for the Colonel, he is immensely struck with her. I may as well dismiss all fears about 'my lady' wishing to marry 'Moppet,' for I overheard her recommending him to think of little Lotty as a wife."

"Heaven forbid! You did not see any symptom in the child as to her liking him?"

"Well, mother, I did—she is so artless. And you know he is a wonderfully handsome man, besides being so beguiling in his ways."

"To-morrow we go to Harpendale, and the week after to the Orams. I am also engaged to take her to Ardmore, where Colonel Moffat will be with her in the house. What shall I do?"

"Let matters take their chance, Mother Hubbard. If my father is pretty well, I am going to Ardmore too—the Colonel asked me. I will help you to watch over this strange little Lotty."

I had to be content with this arrangement.

I was not so absorbed in the painful throes that it cost me to go alone into the world, and mix again with those who were so blended in the happy days of my married life, bringing their every movement back to me, as to neglect my little Lotty.

I dressed her with all the taste and art I possessed; and if her simplicity or little oddity was noticed, it was speedily forgotten as they looked into her pretty face and watched her graceful motions.

## CHAPTER XLI.

### WHAT THE WORLD IS WORTH.



ONCE more I took my place as "Queen of the County;" and as if to do honour to the widow of Peter Mallerdean, or perhaps to reward her for the effort she made to come once more among them, I was received with greater honours than had ever before been accorded me. The lord-lieutenant himself came down to the carriage door to lead me into the ball-room. Lord Harpendale took Lotty. In the ante-chamber were waiting the Orams, the rest of the Ardmores, Lady Harpendale, and most of the head county families. They arranged themselves in the order of their rank, to follow us four into the ball-room. The trum-

peters of the high-sheriff sounded as the door opened and displayed the gentry assembled from far and near, who, making a lane by standing on either side, offered their salutations and welcomes as their queen passed slowly on to the upper end of the ball. There we were met by the high-sheriff, who introduced me to the judges, with whom I exchanged civilities. After a few moments, requesting them to be seated, I took my place on the raised chair that was set for me, and begged the Master of Ceremonies to open the ball.

I declined dancing myself, and they were all good enough to excuse me. During the evening various young debutantes were brought up to undergo the ordeal of an introduction to their queen, and a number of young beaux, as they were then called, went through the same ceremony.

On the announcement of supper, the same ceremony was observed as upon the entrance of the queen, only I was escorted by the high-sheriff instead of the Marquis of Ardmore.

After supper I withdrew, accompanied by the ladies only, and there, surrounded by the female aristocracy and the mothers of the county families, we discussed certain matters that had to do with our public duties in the county. A Dorcas society was wanted. A memorial was proposed to be drawn up to improve the cottages. The young ladies presented a petition for dancing assemblies to be held once a fortnight. Some new people settled in the county sent in their credentials, without which they could not be visited.

These were a few amongst many matters that were brought forward to be discussed, and will serve to show what were my duties.

When the gentlemen joined us, dancing began once more, and lasted until two o'clock. When the trumpeters again sounded, "God save the King" was played, and the Queen and her Court marched down the lane of company to the tune of it, they courteously bowing and curtsying their adieus—and the ball was ended.

Little Lotty, flushed with happiness and excitement, threw herself on my neck when we were safe in the carriage, and sunk into the deep sleep of childhood, while I thought and wept. I had not dared to think for one moment at the ball. If I had, no self-control, no fortitude, no restraint, could have staid the torrent of overwhelming emotions—amongst which the mightiest of all was his loss. In the midst of all this assembly—at the highest moment of exaltation—in the very zenith of laudation and praise—I was as Job seated amongst ashes—as the beggar at the gate of Lazarus—as having all things, yet desolate—forn—hopeless!

Surrounded by kind, by admiring, by loving faces, where was the one that made all the others pleasant to me?

Covered with honour, surfeited with praise, accredited with every virtue, where was he whose slightest glance was worth to me more than all?

Oh! the misery of loneliness in a crowd—of a broken heart in a gay scene.

There is a certain degree of doleful comfort in lying among sack-cloth and ashes. We do this for the sake of one; but in revels, in happiness, in light, in music and dancing, that one was removed far out of sight—that one who, dead, had more power over the crushed heart than all living. But the Rubicon was passed—the ordeal over. Grant me but this one night of wailing, and the morning shall see me calm, rational, ready for all duty—a queen worthy of her crown.

“Dulce,” said little Lotty to me, the morning after the ball, “I was very happy last night—I never was so happy. I felt as if some new power awakened in me.”

“What sort of power?”

“The power of making people happy, as you do. Shall I ever be able to do so?”

“You already make me happy.”

“But could I do otherwise? I should not do what would make you unhappy, because you are as a saint—under the protection of God.”

“You make our father and mother happy.”

“I think I do—they are always pleased with me. I mean the power of pleasing some one whom I have not seen before—to whom I am no relation.”

“You pleased a great many last night.”

“I think I did—they loved me as your sister.”

“Was there one in particular whom you wished to please?”

“Yes, Colonel Moffat.”

“And do you think you did?”

“Yes, I thought so. Did you, Dulce?”

“He admired you very much.”

“Does admire mean the same as love?”

“It is the beginning of love.”

“Thank you, Dulce—Queen Dulce—sweet, good Dulce! I will now go and look for little Peter, as I have no more questions to ask.”

I wrote and told my mother all this, and begged her advice.

She answered: “This is that phase of life that I predicted would open Lotty’s eyes to see the world as we see it—full of good and evil. I think you must let matters take their course—I would rather run any hazard than stay the current of her thoughts at present. I do not conceive for a moment that Colonel Moffat does more than admire her as a pretty child. I must trust in that God who watches over all my children, that no ill will ensue. In whatever way the matter ends, my Dulce, your love and care are not to be doubted.

So I waited events.

While we were at Ardmore, Colonel Moffat’s attentions to little Lotty became so marked, that his uncle spoke to me about them.

“Mrs. Mallerdean, I can see on your face a little cloud of anxiety. It is about that fairy child and my nephew?”

"She is rather a responsibility. She is not like other girls—I scarce know how it would affect her if she were to love and not be loved in return."

"I believe my nephew is in earnest. So much that I desire to learn from you whether you would approve of him for a brother-in-law?"

"No, my lord. You wish me to be frank. Colonel Moffat does not bear that character which will warrant the assurance of my sister's happiness."

"You are right; yet, at the same time, none know better than men of his stamp the value of a loving and virtuous wife."

"Men of that stamp require some other virtue in their wives to steady them than prettiness and goodness."

"True—and if he tired of her——"

"Then her heart would break; you can see that, my lord."

"I do. I will speak to him quietly. I will tell him he has no friend in you, and he must not persist in his attentions."

"Thank you."

The remonstrance had no effect upon Colonel Moffat. He seemed to redouble his love-making. So I shortened my visit, and came home.

Little Lotty was sad, but loving and good as usual. I suffered her to go to the Great House the next day, upon an invitation from Lady Lanton.

Buffy brought her home in the evening.

"Colonel Moffat was there," she said, eagerly.

"You were not to tell that, you know, to anybody," remarked Buffy.

"That did not mean Dulce—I must tell everything to Dulce."

"Thanks, love; go and take off your things, and when you return we will have a long talk."

While she was absent, Buffy told me that his mother, the Countess, and Colonel Moffat were all in league together. What ultimate intentions they had he did not know; but he could not help fancying the two latter were determined to inflict some terrible blow upon me; while Lady Lanton, though quite ready to join in any scheme which was to annoy me, could not be induced to do anything to harm or to pain the pretty little innocent creature to whom she had taken a strange liking.

"You must send Lotty home, Mother Hubbard," concluded Buffy.

I silently assented. He left me before Lotty returned. When she came into the room she sat at my feet, and laid her head on my lap.

"Colonel Moffat loves me, sister, and I—I love him."

"You have told each other so, darling?"

"Yes; we said it to each other to-day; Lady Lanton gave me leave."

"You are happy."

"Yes, I am happy; yet again unhappy. She who lives up there—

the woman who is called Countess—told me that you loved Colonel Moffat. Dulce, his name is Frederick—I am to call him Frederick.”

Dear, pretty child! she half-whispered this to herself.

“No, Lotty,” I said; “I dislike Colonel Moffat.”

“Dislike! what is that?”

“The feeling that you have towards her whom you call ‘woman,’ up at Mallerdean.”

“And is that dislike? I simply feel nothing about her. She is to me like a dream, or cloud, that I forget, as it fades away. Why is he—Frederick—like that to you?”

“Because he is not a good man.”

“That is what Buffy told me, Dulce. But Lady Lanton also said that you loved him; in short, Dulce, they both said to me, ‘Your sister will not let you marry him.’”

“I do not wish you to marry him, Lotty.”

“Ah, Dulce, am I to die, then?”

“Not if I can die for you,” I said.

“Dear Dulce, when we were little things in the nursery, Dudu always gave up everything for us. She will do so now for me.”

“Willingly, dear; but listen—you love him you call Frederick. Can you ever love another as you love him?”

“Oh! never! never!”

“Then you can understand, so did I love Peter, your brother. When he died, I besought God to take me also. I refused to be comforted—I lay down waiting to die—I uncovered his dead face, and looked thereon, waiting for my heart to burst; at that moment I heard a child’s voice. Then I remembered that your brother had left a little child, and that I must live for the sake of Peter’s child. When my son wants me no more, I shall go home to where his father is waiting for me.”

“Why did they say you loved Frederick?”

“They say it that you might trust them, and not me. I wish you to put faith in me, and me only. I desire your happiness, dear child.”

“What do you wish me to do, Dulce?”

“To see Colonel Moffat no more until he has spoken to our father and mother.”

“I can promise that; but, Dulce, you will try to like him?”

“I love you so much, that if ever you are his wife, that love will suffice for both.”

I wrote that evening to my father and mother. On the following morning the Mallerdean carriage came down for Lotty. I sent it back without her, and fearing the consequences, begged her to go and spend the morning with Lady Joyce. She had scarcely reached her house, when the door of my sitting-room was thrown open, and Colonel Moffat was announced. He began by fulsome praise of myself. I received him coldly enough, but not one whit abashed, he began to propitiate me, as he thought, by the high-flown expression of his admi-

ration for me. He said, if he could have flattered himself with the most distant hope of obtaining my favour, he would have left nothing undone to deserve it. He flung in amongst his remarks, with much skill, a catalogue of all his worldly advantages, his probable wealth and position. Suddenly, seeing my displeasure at this strain, he hastened to add that, seeing no hope of obtaining my affection, which, to him, would have been a priceless treasure, he had turned to my sister Lotty. The only thing left him was the hope of becoming my brother.

"Real love," I said coldly, "never woos after this fashion. If you have no stronger affection for my sister than what is inspired by the wish to become my brother, our conversation is at an end."

"Pray don't be so hasty. It is impossible not to love the pretty impulsive creature."

"Impulsive!" I replied. "That word is offensive and disrespectful, as applied to my sister."

"I am unfortunate. Nothing I can say finds favour with you," he answered, and tried to look humble.

"Because, sir, you are acting a part. You try to gain the love and affection of a young guileless girl, knowing that you do not care for it in reality. You care only for yourself, and your own amusement. You are thus acting in this affair from some double motive, either to oblige your uncle—who desires to see you married—in which case you had better choose some fashionable girl with a heart like your own; or else you are incited to endanger my sister's happiness, because you and your advisers know that you can give me pain through her suffering."

"Nay, madam, why should you think so hardly of me? I have offered my hand to your sister—she has accepted it. If I remember right, you gave away your heart in half the time that she has. It is almost a month since the happy day on which I first saw her."

His manner was flippant and coxcombical. He meant to offend me, to make it apparent to me that, as he must marry, he would select a little, foolish, loving thing, who was pretty enough to be his wife, and fond enough to give him no trouble.

I felt it was best to be calm, so I said:

"I wrote last night to her father and mother. Until they arrive I must request you not to attempt to see my sister."

"Has she a father and mother? Where do they live? I beg your pardon. I thought you were her sole protector and guardian."

My only reply was to ring the bell, and order his horse to be brought round.

The more I thought over the matter, the more convinced I became that there was some plot at the bottom of it. He had no intention of marrying the child. The tones of his voice had a ring of mockery, when he spoke of her, that was most galling. While his manner, his expression, the glow in his eyes, was more offensive and insolent when he alluded to me. It was easy to read that a conquest over me would be the most gratifying to his vanity—or was it malice? I felt sure that

some inimical feeling was at work ; it might be either revenge or ambition. A marriage with me would be good in a worldly point of view, and he might feel a charm in the effort to subdue a proud woman who disliked and despised him. These motives combined would make him try every method to succeed. Did he think for one moment that to save my Lotty I would sacrifice myself?

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## CHAPTER XLII.

## THE DIFFICULTY OF LIVING IN IT.



HAD not much time to pursue my thoughts, for the rapid clattering of a carriage driving up prepared me for Lady Lanton. She entered, and I saw she was in the worst mood.

Should I now tell her of the Countess ? It seemed disloyal to her to keep the secret longer. Or would she say something by which I should be justified in telling her that other secret ? I was overwhelmed by both my secrets, and felt bewildered by both.

She scarcely greeted me, and before I could speak she asked haughtily for Lotty, and said she should not leave the house without her. She had brought her maid with her to pack up her things, to take her altogether away from my charge. The absurd jealousy of my disposition, the enviousness of my nature, the ill-temper that, not being happy myself, made me dislike that any other person should be so, warranted her in removing such a sweet creature from unkind care. She had heard of me at Harpendale—my airs, my pride, the arrogance with which I queened it ; but I had done so for the last time—the whole county should hear the truth.

There is a certain limit to human breath and tongue. After searching the house, Lady Lanton left, but not before I told her that I had written to my father and mother, to tell them of the honour done to their daughter by Colonel Moffat's proposal, and that in six days at the latest I expected their arrival, and that until then the lovers must not meet.

She laughed scornfully as she departed ; but I knew I could trust Lotty.

And I was right.

They tried all possible means to surprise her into an interview with him. The attempts that were open, and patent to her mind, such as letters or messages, she brought at once to me. When they endeavoured by stratagem to lead her to meet him, she did not understand them, and so did not obey. She had promised me not to see or speak to Colonel Moffat until our parents should arrive. In all this Buffy was of the greatest use. He warned me of every plot, and was

at hand in every emergency. Poor little Lotty drooped and faded. She was like a little snowdrop blighted by a keen frost.

"I feel a foreboding," she said constantly.

"Do you feel no strength to battle against it?"

"No," she answered, shivering; "but it is from nothing you said about him. Lady Joyce spoke of Frederick as people speak of those whom we are not to love. If he is of that nature that I may not love him, how dark the world will be!"

Poor little Lotty! Love was awakening her reasoning powers. Would it be for good or ill?

It was on the fourth day after Lady Lanton's visit that we were sitting together talking. I encouraged her to speak of Colonel Moffat, and prepared her gently for what I was sure would be the decree of our father and mother. A carriage drove up to the door. Once more—without preparation—without the common civility of asking the favour of an interview—Mr. Cator and Adrian Levassue were ushered into the room.

After exchanging the usual salutations, he begged the favour of seeing me alone. As Lotty rose at this remark to leave the room, she plucked me by the sleeve. I followed her out.

"Is that Frederick's brother?" she whispered.

In an instant flashed upon me the likeness I had been unable to trace. A rush of joy—and overwhelming ecstasy—made me clasp her in my arms, and almost carry her to my bed-room. "Thank God! thank God!" I whispered to my heart.

"Answer me!" she pleaded; "why do you look so glad?"

"Not his brother, I replied; 'tis his son."

"Son! Was he married before?"

"No, that is why we think him not fit to be your husband; because he has a son and never had a wife. Do you understand, my Lotty?"

"Yes. There is that grave in the church-yard always covered with flowers. Lady Joyce told me the man who dresses it does so from remorse, because the girl, Mary Arcot, buried there, was disgraced by him, and could not live. Where is she that he—that Fre—that Colonel Moffat disgraced?"

"I will tell you if you wish it; but she lives——"

"Then I will not hear her name. He ought to marry her; and I might hate her, Dulce."

"No, Lotty, that you could not do; but dare I leave you?"

"Yes, yes, go back to those people. As for me, I shall speak to God. I will wait here for you, Dulce."

I kissed her fondly and returned.

Both Mr. Cator and his pupil were in different parts of the room, and I fancy I traced a slight disorder in it, as if some one had been searching under and about.

It needed all the happiness that Lotty's discovery had given me to enable me to withstand the shock of Mr. Cator's first remark.



"Madam, I come to demand a paper, or parchment, which affects the interests of my pupil, Master Levassue, and which you sent a lady friend to abduct from my house, and which my wife weakly permitted her to take."

"Have you seen the paper?" I asked, moved to do so by his apparent ignorance of what it really was.

"No, madam, I have not; but Master Levassue can tell you all about it."

In one of those high-pitched, unfortunate voices that young men of his age sometimes possess, this youth told his tale.

"He had the box or block of wood covered with pictures, given him by young Master Mallerdean, some time in his possession before he noticed it was hollow. He took means to open it, and was disappointed to see nothing but a scorched parchment. As he turned it over he saw his own name on it. He could not think why it should be there. He thought some of the young Cators had already opened the box, and put in this thing to annoy him. So he shut it up in vexation, and thought to punish them by not letting them see that he knew of it. But at times he looked at it, and read it. Sometimes he opened the other pages, and tried to read the rest of it. But he could not understand any part of it, save the constant repetition of the name 'Dulce Mallerdean.' By degrees he began to conceive that the young Cators had not put this parchment into the box, but that it really was hidden by Mrs. Mallerdean in it, for some reason of her own. He pondered over this for some time, and thought at times of writing to her to demand his right. He had no inclination to tell Mr. Cator. He only kept asking him what could be done with a sum of money such as three thousand pounds." (I do not know if I have intimated before that this boy was a little deficient in sense. I should rather have said that cunning was the only faculty that seemed awake; all his other ideas were either dead or dormant. In all other respects he was stupid, and averse to learning anything.)

"Mr. Cator's suspicions were aroused. He asked him, 'Where he hoped to get the three thousand pounds?' In a moment of irritation against Mr. Cator, for making light of his words, and seeming to consider him foolish for talking about his expectations, he told him about the parchment he had found in the box, and ran to fetch it, but it was gone. Inquiry and search brought out the truth. The more Mr. Cator heard, the more he was inclined to put faith in what the youth said. If Mrs. Mallerdean had sent a lady a long and fatiguing journey to obtain this paper, of course it was valuable—incalculably valuable in many respects.

"Mr. Cator could now account for the many presents coming to his wife and children from that part of the world. They were bribes, and though sent in the name of Lady Joyce, they were in reality hush gifts from Mrs. Mallerdean, who was desirous of defrauding Master Levassue out of his rights."

This was the sum of what I gathered from the two, as they took up the story one after the other.

"I do not deny, Mr. Cator, that the parchment was of consequence to me."

"In fact, madam, it is your late husband's will, which, I have been told, is missing."

"It may be so, or it may not, its withdrawal affected me more than any other person; but let me ask this young gentleman, did not the paragraph relating to you say two hundred a year annuity, or three thousand pounds paid down in lieu thereof?"

"It said three thousand pounds," persisted he.

"Then, Mr. Cator, here is a copy of the paragraph that I took when I recovered the document, in case Mr. Levassue asked concerning it."

Mr. Cator's countenance fell visibly as he read it.

"I should wish to see the real codicil," he said, a last.

"That I cannot permit."

"Then, madam, we will take the three thousand pounds, instead of the annuity."

"You only say that to annoy me, Mr. Cator; it is left to my discretion, not yours, which I pay."

"Madam, I shall have to force you to give up the will."

"You can do so; but then I shall use my further prerogative of not furnishing Mr. Levassue with either annuity or money."

Mr. Cator again read the copy, and twisted it about in various ways.

"I have come here at great expense," he said.

"I will have my three thousand pounds," said the young man, in a voice between a shrill scream and a squeak.

I was silent.

"Madam, as I cannot get justice or kind feeling from you, or any sympathy, I shall go to Lady Lanton. I shall tell her Mr. Mallerdean's will is in your possession."

As he said this I saw an ugly sort of satisfaction gleam over his face. He seemed perfectly aware that this news would be by no means pleasant news to her. As he could get nothing out of me, probably he might extort something from her to keep him silent.

I watched his face; he evidently was pleased with his own idea.

"Yes, madam, I shall tell Lady Lanton the will is found. I am perfectly aware, though it may not be pleasant news to her, it will give great satisfaction to many people."

He looked at me. I still made no reply.

"I know many people who would give a great deal to hear the missing will was found."

"I have ordered you some refreshment, sir; perhaps you will go into the next room and partake of it."

I did not go with them. On the contrary, a fixed resolve had taken possession of my mind. It neither became Lady Lanton nor myself to be in the power of a man like Mr. Cator.

Now was the opportunity given me of affording Lady Lanton the chance of retrieving her crime. If she could conquer her years of hatred towards me, she might still do right at last. She had been hardly dealt with about the Countess, and this will much altered her position, and gave me the advantage over her. I had done very wrong in keeping the will back so long ; but now I would make atonement, though an agony of recollection should pierce me through and through when I had to enter that house again.

I spoke a few words to Lotty, who quickly saw in my face that some matter of importance was on my mind. Looking at me with clear, solemn eyes, she replied—

“Think not of me, Dulce ; go and do what is right.”

## CHAPTER XLIII.

### VICTORY



WAS through the little gate. I was running up the wild woodland pathway that led by a short cut straight to Mallerdean House ; to that archway—to that stone I was running, in my impatience to arrive.

“Oh, Peter ! if I have sinned against your sister in aught, will not this hour atone ?”

When I neared the spot I bent my head, as if to deprecate the flashing sword of a destroying angel. I touched the archway ; a low wailing cry broke from my lips. I flung out my arms, and clung to the old stones as if I would beseech mercy from them. But I might not stay ; I went as though driven onwards, and entered once more that house where I had been so blessed, and so utterly bereft—“the desire of mine eyes taken away from me with a stroke.” I went into that great reverberating hall, at the door of which he had met me on that dark night when I returned from electioneering. I heard a voice in my ears, crying, “Go on !—go on !—remain but one instant, give way to one thought, dwell upon one recollection, and the cause for which you come hither will be lost.”

I went straight, like one walking in sleep, to Lady Lanton’s private sitting-room. She was sitting there alone. She gazed at me as at an apparition. Throwing off my bonnet, and gasping for breath, I knelt down before her to bring her face on a level with mine. Then, as calmly as I could, I said :

“You have heard of Mr. Cator and Adrian Levassue.”

“I have had letters from him.”

“He is coming up here—he will come soon. He is bringing that boy—that Adrian Levassue—to you, to tell you that he is Peter’s—our Peter’s son !”

"What!" she exclaimed, and I saw with gladness that she flushed with highest anger, with loftiest scorn; "who dares to say it?"

"They do—these two, who are coming up to see you. I ran the short way to be here before them."

"Is there any one who says this besides them?"

"Yes, his mother."

"Where is she?—who is she?"

"Come with me, and I will tell you."

I gave her no time to express astonishment—to say one word of doubt or contempt for me. Claspings her hand, I led her to that room—his room.

"Open this drawer," I said.

She obeyed. There, undisturbed, lay the packet endorsed by Peter's handwriting—"Matters regarding Adrian Levassue."

"Open and read," I said; "then call me if you want me."

I passed into his room and mine. There was the bed whereon he had lain dead, and on which I had lain down when his coffin was gone. I sat on it now. Inwardly I prostrated my soul before God. There was no need for me to kneel; God saw me suing in passionate appeal.

"You took him from me in a moment. I had no preparation. For a time human nature succumbed. Oh! my God! I sinned with my lips. Thy servant was beside herself. But Thou didst pardon and succour. Thou hast lifted me up, so that I go about; I busy myself with the world's work; I strive to do my duty. These four years, Lord, have I humbly borne my sorrow; if, now, I have found favour in Thy sight, grant me the love of his sister who has hated me. It pleased Thee to take from me my husband, make her my sister. Give her to me, Lord—give her to me, for Jesus Christ's sake!"

Thus did I pray; no words uttered, but this petition ever and ever growing up in every form, in a strong, piercing, mental cry to Heaven. And all the while I listened for an answer from the other room. I heard a sharp cry; she rushed in; she saw me there—seated.

"Is this a forgery?"

"Peter said not."

"Have you read it?"

"Never."

"Do you know the name of that mother?"

"Yes, the Countess Harmann! She has demanded money from me as the price for your brother's good name."

"'Tis false! 'tis false! His good name!—how dare she? Oh! Peter, why did you not tell me? Cruel—cruel to leave me in ignorance!"

"Ah, sister," I exclaimed, clasping her round the waist, as she sat beside me, "that is what I feel. You ought to have been told; I wish—I wish you had been told."

Some idle zephyr floating about moved my hair, stirred the cur-

tains—or was it the rustle of unseen wings. She startled and looked about.

“Does Peter see us?—is he near?”

“Yes, yes, he breathes on us!—kiss me, sister, let us promise each other to free his name.”

She turned and kissed me, gently—solemnly. As for me, overcome with the varied emotions of the day, I lost consciousness. Her voice restored me.

“Dulce, dear Dulce, look up! Indeed I will be your sister. I will love you—forgive me! oh! forgive me! One sigh, one word, one look, before you go! Do not die, Dulce, without forgiving me!”

I could press her hand before the power of speech was restored to me. I felt the value of time and signed to her to go on reading the papers.

She did so, repeating what smote her mind the most—aloud.

“He saw what he did not like—they quarrelled—he broke through the engagement; she promised amendment, but there was no amendment. She flirted still with—*blank*!—the name is blank, Dulce!—who is he?”

“You will know when you see Adrian Levassue.”

“She besought pardon again with tears. His love, Peter’s love, had given place to disgust—he told her so. All her arts, her beauty, her cajoleries, only hardened him the more. In a passion of love that had turned to hate, she said she would make him marry her.”

And now, for my sex’s sake, I bury for ever all record of the means she used to fulfil her threat. They were of that nature, which, to an honourable heart, implants a sting of remorse, in spite of an almost certainty of falsehood.

While he could not deny her assertions, every feeling revolted against the truth of them. His own nature rose abhorrent.

It was this that made him, young and inexperienced, so resolute to incur obloquy, exposure, and scorn, sooner than give such a woman his name. In vain her family threatened—that she implored.

Few have lived to half a century without meeting in their pilgrimage of life some such unhappy victim, who, by mischance, by design, by the wickedness of others, has been dragged into a fate and existence at once deplorable, degrading, and utterly antagonistic to their own feelings.

It requires a resolute nature, a high courage, and that inherent rectitude of mind, which starts aside from evil, as the high-spirited horse swerves from danger, to rise out of a pitfall such as entrapped Peter Mallerdean.

And rare is it, happily, to meet with a woman who has so unsexed herself that she can be wooer, betrayer, and accuser in one.

Again and again did Lady Lanton cry out, “Why was I not told?” There was not in her exclamations so much the horror of the crime unfolded, as that her brother’s name should be smeared and tarnished with sins that revolted her.

Like an ensnared lioness, she chafed and raved.

In vain I essayed to calm her, to point out that in reality his good name remained as it ever was—bright before the world.

“And do you think that will suffice me? No! his accuser, his slanderer, shall be hunted to the death. I will tear her base falsehood from her lips, and make her proclaim herself what she is; and the least of her titles is that of Liar!”

“Nay—nay, the world will be none the better for the wretched story. They will but think there was some reason for it. Just as may be the voice of the multitude—sympathy with a victim sways it, like the roll of a sea. She will exact this sympathy—if we forget that God has withdrawn her victim from further touch or stab of hers. Let us act towards her as he acted——”

“Never—never!”

“But—Emma—sister—can we bear—can you bear—the raking up of other days?—oh! think—of the misery we shall endure, the opening of wounds still sore and rankling. Let us be merciful to her.”

Again did Lady Lanton cry out,

“Why was I not told?”

At this moment we heard the great door bell ring, and the reverberating sound of the door opening and closing.

“They are come,” I whispered.

“I will not see them; I will send the Countess this history.”

“But, sister Emma, I also have dealt ill by you, and you must forgive me. Nearly four years ago now, a white and feeble figure was staggering into this room, where he whom we both love so much lay on this bed in his coffin. As she fluttered in the doorway another figure passed swiftly through the room, in her hand a parchment.”

“Dulce, Dulce, hush! hush! Say no more!”

“Only a little. This parchment I obtained, no matter how. I kept it concealed in a little box in my room; you must have seen it often, covered with common prints, painted by Buffy.”

She bowed her head in assent, but did not look at me.

“Our little Peter gave this box, after some innocent little lordly conceit of his brain, to this boy Adrian, who had been brought by Mr. Cator to be left with me if I would not pay his demands, and the children had gone to play together whilst we talked. I did not discover my loss for months. When I did, my agony was great. Without divulging the secret, I employed one whom I could trust, to get it back for me. Sister Emma, here—here it is, I have brought it to you.”

And I drew it from my pocket.

She grasped it for a moment, and then dropping it, hid her face with both hands.

“Now, forgive me for this,” I continued; “the box had been opened. This boy had seen his own name written in it—see, here it is. Before he could make up his mind to tell any one, or show it them, I had it

safely back. No one has seen it but him. He is weak and foolish—no one will regard anything he may say, but he has told Mr. Cator enough to make him suspect that this is the missing will. He comes to threaten you ; he thinks to extract money from you by telling you that he knows the long-lost will is found. Together we shall baffle him. We can tell him it was never mislaid, but that, out of deference to my wishes, and in kindness to my shattered health and spirits, you released me from the cares and charges of this place.”

She pressed my hand.

“Now let us go. Let us cleanse the house of Mallerdean from these people.”

“The Countess—Julia—I cannot see her again.”

“Enclose her these papers—that will suffice. Surely she will then leave the house of her own accord.”

We rose, and were about to leave the room, when Lady Lanton stopped, and, drawing my face down to hers, she kissed me, saying,

“Thank you, Dulce.”

As we went along the passage we were met by Buffy, who, astonished at seeing me, was for a moment silent. Then some sudden inspiration seizing him, he took hold of his mother's hand and kissed it.

“How is your father?” she asked, gently.

“I was coming for you, mother ; there is a great change in him.”

“I will be there presently.”

The housekeeper met us—her face expressed something more than surprise.

“Mrs. Mallerdean requests you to prepare her own rooms for her reception, as well as the nurseries for Master Mallerdean,” said Lady Lanton, quietly, and we passed on.

A servant met us, and announced the arrival of a person with a young gentleman, who desired to see Lady Lanton on a matter of importance.

“I told him, my lady, you could not see him ; but he insisted, so I asked them into the steward's room.”

“Send them to my sitting-room at once.”

In a few minutes Mr. Cator, with the boy in his hand, entered. He looked crestfallen when he saw me. Lady Lanton walked straight up to Adrian Levassue, and brushing his hair from his face, gazed steadily at him. Then with a slight blow on his cheek,

“A Moffat face,” she exclaimed. “Take him to his father, and pollute Mallerdean no longer with your presence.”

Her haughtiness seemed to crush them both for a moment ; but Mr. Cator rallied—he had, as he thought, still a card in reserve.

“Lady Lanton, I am aware of your prejudices—of your feelings with regard to your brother—but I come on a different errand—his will.”

“There it is,” she answered ; “take it, look at it, do what you like about it !” and she threw it at him.

He picked it up, he opened it, he read the codicil. At last he said : "There has been an attempt to destroy this document ; it is scorched, and partly burned."

"It is true. I tried to destroy it. Now I rejoice that it is safe. What more do you want ? Man, what can you do now ?"

He turned pale—he trembled. He turned to me.

"I have a wife—children—they are starving. Mr. Mallerdean used to respect me. Mr. Mallerdean would have been my friend."

"Send that boy home to his own father, and I will allow you the two hundred a year. Take him at once. Drive up to Ardmore Castle ; let them see the likeness ; let them own he is no son of Peter Mallerdean's, and I promise you the two hundred a year," exclaimed Lady Lanton.

In a few moments they were gone ; but even in those moments the unfortunate boy felt, of all the actors in the day's events, none were likely to suffer so much as himself. Mr. Cator, as became so mean a soul, changed at once, and dropping the coaxing, fawning tone of former days, ordered him to follow him, as a man might speak to his hound.

As the door closed upon them, another opened, and the Countess appeared.

Haughty and contemptuous as Lady Lanton had been with Mr. Cator, it was nothing to her aspect at the sight of this woman—though she did not speak one word.

I whispered, "Peter spared her, let us follow his example."

She grasped my hand very hard for a moment, and then said :

"Have you been listening at that door, Countess ?"

"Yes—assisted at the scene throughout ; and you know I am not easily to be persuaded to change what I have once said," she answered with a light laugh.

"I have just sent your son to Ardmore, to his papa," said Lady Lanton.

"Have you ?" said the other. "How surprised they will be ! Moffat has taken advantage of this opportunity ; he saw Mrs. Mallerdean come this way, and knowing the cottage was unguarded, he has gone down to visit his pretty silly *fiancée*. He has been with her this hour."

Lady Lanton rang the bell, and ordered a carriage. I felt stunned with sudden fear.

"I will go for her," said Lady Lanton to me. "You have borne enough. Will you stay in Sir Brough's room until I return ?"

She then sent for the steward, and desired him to assist the Countess Harmann in all that she required, to enable her to leave Mallerdean in an hour. Lady Lanton's people knew well enough the penalty of disobeying her. The carriage was not five minutes ere it came to the door.

Lady Lanton had never looked at the Countess since she had spoken



of her son, and she left the room, when the carriage was announced, as though the Countess had become invisible.

Her bravado was gone, and the Countess looked what she was, a miserable woman.

"Go," I said, gently, "make your preparations to depart quickly. When her brother's name is exculpated, she will remember you with mercy. More I cannot promise."

"She merely makes the boy a pretext. She is tired of me. She throws me off."

"For sixteen years you have permitted a slander to be coupled with her brother's name. You who know her so well, must be conscious that she will never forget it, or forgive it. You will do well to leave her house."

"Her house! It is yours. You alone have power here."

"If I have, I reiterate her orders. Leave our house. You have slandered him we loved; your presence is hateful. May God pardon you, as I will try to do, but go. You have no right to be here."

"Where am I to go? I have no money."

"Neither have I."

I sent for the steward—and from him obtained £50. This I gave her—and then we parted.

## CHAPTER XLIV

"ALL IS VANITY, SAITH THE PREACHER."



WENT to Sir Brough's room. He was evidently dying.

"He changed at twelve," whispered Buffy; "since which he has been conscious twice, and knew me. He asked for my mother, and said she had been a good and virtuous wife to a very bad husband. I wish she would come. She ought to be here when he wakes again."

I also was anxious for her return—she was a long time away. I felt sick with fear as to what might have happened—I felt I had neglected my little Lotty.

"I can wait no longer—Buffy, I must run down to the cottage."

But in truth I had not the bodily strength to move.

As I struggled to make the exertion, I heard the dear child's voice at the door—she ran in, like a little noiseless fairy, and hid her little white face on my shoulder.

Whisperingly, so as not to disturb the dying sleeper, she told me her tale.

"I bid you go, Dulce, with a brave heart; but I felt, as you left me, that I would beseech the Almighty to take me out of this world—it was too sad to live in. I thought of all your sorrow and suffering, and

I felt frightened at what might come to me. If you were to be punished, what might not be accorded to me, who only lived as the butterflies, sucking sweets from everything? My head ached with thinking. I was like the butterfly in a storm—drenched—crushed. And then I thought of the tale Lady Joyce told me of Mary Arcot, who was frightened out of the world. As I was thinking of her, I heard a noise, sister—some one was at the door—some one who had no right to be near your chamber door. I was frightened, for I knew the servants were far off, in the other house. I crept away, and hid myself behind the bed, drawing the curtain, so that I could see and not be seen. Some one softly, gently slid back the door—and he came in—you know whom I mean, Dulce.

“He came on—he looked all round—he was close to the bed where I had been lying. He touched the pillow, and started, for it was warm. He went hastily into the next room, and looked all about, and then came back. I heard him say, ‘The little fool!’ And now, sister, what do you think I saw? This man—who professed to love me, who had asked me to be his wife, who had sworn that he never loved until he saw me—took up your things that lay scattered about, and kissed them passionately. I will not pain you, sister, by relating all the tokens he gave that he loved you, and not me.

“Do not think, Dulce, that I am envious, or that I begrudged you his love, when I tell you it seemed to me that a mask had fallen from his face. I shuddered to look at him; he seemed to me more than ugly—abhorrent! I could not bear him to touch your gloves, your handkerchief—or to kiss your picture—and I felt nothing for the great sighs that came from his heart, and the feelings that brought large drops of perspiration on his brow.

“‘Dulce, Dulce,’ he murmured, ‘I would give up every hope of life for one look of love from you!’

“And I am sure what he said was true; but, sister, all the while his face had nothing good in its expression—there was that in it which made me feel what devils must be like. I now know what devils are. Before I could not understand—only think about them.

“I did not like him to touch your pretty things, and I had a mind to step out and forbid him. But two things stopped me, sister. I did not wish him to think I was in the same room with him—and I was sure he would impute my anger to jealousy. He does not know that the children of our father and mother cannot be jealous of each other. A few days ago, when to my weak mind he was as the most perfect of human beings, I could have given him up to you, had you wished me, Dulce.”

“I know it, Lotty.”

“I thought he would never go. He seemed unable to tear himself away. The sliding-door was still wide open. He appeared to hear a noise, for he stepped out, and went to the head of the stairs. Then I crept out, and went through the dressing-room, on into the passage.

I watched my opportunity, and went by the open doorway when his back was towards it. Down-stairs I passed, as light as a feather, and going across the yard, brought Mason back with me, and bid her keep watch, for that some one was in her mistress's room, and I would go and see who it was. I then went up-stairs again, straight to the door of your room. I confronted him, and asked him boldly why he was there.

"'Looking for you,' he answered, with all those sugared, soft epithets I had thought so much of.

"I did not seem to hear him, but desired him to follow me, and I went to the front door.

"I could not bear him to think that I was disappointed or love-sick. I tried to look like you, and to put on that composed, dignified air which you have sometimes. And oh ! Dulce, I think I must have succeeded, for he looked astonished.

"'You must leave this house, Colonel Moffat,' I began, 'because there is no one in it but myself.'

"'Sweetest creature !' he answered, 'that is why I came.'

"'But you will go now, at my desire ?'

"'You must first let me plead my cause to you. Lotty, your sister is my enemy, she will never permit you to marry me. I came to beseech you to let me take you to your father and mother.'

"'We expect them to-morrow.'

"'Will they befriend us ? Will they consent ? Will they not rather be biassed by Mrs. Mallerdean ?'

"He put in all manner of tender words, but they made me very angry.

"'No, Colonel Moffat, there will be no necessity for Mrs. Mallerdean to give her opinion, they will have mine.'

"'Ah ! Lotty, then am I happy !' and he took hold of my hand.

"I drew it hastily away. I had thought it best not to irritate him. I felt so weak and small. But this roused me. I felt that I had become all at once a high-spirited woman, so I said, coldly and politely :

"'I feel sure, Colonel Moffat, you will not oblige me again to request your absence, when you learn from my own lips that under no possible circumstances can I ever be induced to become your wife.'

"'You have been tutored to say this.'

"I did not seem to hear him.

"'I will not wed a bad man, who has a son, but who has never had a wife ; and neither can I love a disloyal person, who would marry without love.'

"At this moment Lady Lanton drove up, and he turned to her, and said, as she alighted :

"'Our little snow-drop has become a stinging nettle !'

"She made no reply, but walked into the house. Then she turned towards him. Oh ! Dulce, what scorn was in her manner, what bitterness in her words ! I cannot repeat half she said. She called him

hound, poltroon, knave ; she said God had made it clear to the world he was such, for He had stamped the Moffat face on his base-born son, and she had taken care the world should know this, and should see him. That she had sent him to Ardmore, where he was by that time. She then began to speak of her brother. In the exuberant wealth of his noble character, Peter Mallerdean had taken care, all these years, that this unhappy child should not suffer for the sins of his parents. Nameless, stained by birth, blasted by the mere fact of being born, he would prevent him suffering from starvation, ignorance, and vice. But now enough had been done ; the name of his father was written on his face. As for what was past, the money, the care that had been bestowed upon him, why, let no more be said. Peter Mallerdean was always generous ; when he gave to beggars he expected no return, not even gratitude. The Moffats had been indebted for many civilities to the Mallerdeans, and let the care and education, and board and lodging, and washing and clothing of this base-born son be thrown in. They were welcome to it all.

“ Oh ! Dulce, Dulce, how she flung all these words in heaps upon his head !

“ Then he replied. He gave her back scorn for scorn. He twitted her about a will.

“ ‘ Ah ! ’ she interrupted, and her words fell distinct and clear, like the sound of a bell on a calm night. ‘ You have reminded me in time. Get ready, Lotty ; we will drive round by Mallerdean. That I may not feel myself of the same flesh and blood as a Moffat, I will myself give up the will to Mr. Allen—I will draw his attention to its scorched and damaged condition—I will tell him it was I who did it—that he may proclaim it to the whole world ; if he does not, I shall. Let me be stigmatised—let me be humbled—let me eat the bitterest bread of mortification for the rest of my life—but let me not be mean—base—a liar—a Moffat ! ’

“ He looked astonished.

“ ‘ And Dulce ? ’ he asked falteringly.

“ ‘ Dulce ! how dare you name that name ?—a name that you know is hallowed far and near. Yes, I say it—I acknowledge it—I thank God it is joined with Mallerdean. You may wonder—you may raise your hands in astonishment—but in the midst of my maddest temper—my wildest rage—I honoured her. I did more—I admired her, in spite of myself. Now there is no compulsion, she is my Dulce Mallerdean—my lovely, loving, beloved Dulce Mallerdean—Peter’s Dulce—and so mine always, for ever.’

“ And so saying, sister, we got into the carriage. Not only did we go to Mr. Allen’s, and she did to the exact letter what she said she would, but she wrote letters to Lord Harpendale, Lady Oram, and others ; besides which she sent for the town ringers, and gave them five guineas to ring in the news that Mrs. Mallerdean had got her rights, and was now at Mallerdean House, and mistress of it, as had

been her husband's desire and wish. When the people cheered with all their might she wept—yes, Dulce wept as heartily as I did myself. And now here we are ; and, sister, I am weary, but thankful. Oh ! so thankful ! I think, now, it will be so happy that I may remain always with papa and mamma. I will remain and take care of them in their old age."

(I read all this to Sir Brough, as I had read the former portion of these recollections, though I have not inserted all his observations, nor the discursive consultations to which they gave rise. When I paused after reading the above, he said in his dear testy voice—

"Well, Mother Hubbard, you have got through the description of that day better than I expected. What a day it was !—wound up by the death of my poor father."

"That we were all expecting every moment, Buffy ; it was a happy release."

"It was, yet somehow I had got to love him very much."

"He was so fond and proud of you."

"It was owing to his critical state that I could not give my mind to all that was going on. Your sudden appearance at Mallerdean, the marvellous dismissal of the Countess, the astounding sight of seeing 'my lady' kiss you, were surprises that altogether overwhelmed me."

"I have always thought it so happy a circumstance that your mother's heart was softened before she was summoned to receive your father's last breath, and that he was conscious of her presence."

"Well, as I have heard it said, he made a good end, and died in peace with all men, and apparently much comforted by his wife's dutiful leave-taking."

"Buffy ! Buffy ! what are you saying ?"

"Mother Hubbard, I should not like to live so that the people who stand round my death-bed should think I am about to do the most sensible action of my life. I don't believe any of you mourned my father except myself."

"I did not know much of him, Buffy."

"Oh ! I excuse you for better reasons than that too. However, I ought not to have been amazed when I recall to mind the wonderful doings of my lady that wonderful day. She began by being herself ; that is, she was disagreeable. Suddenly she heard a piece of news which roused in her a passion of virtuous indignation, and turned her hatred on somebody else ; she must hate somebody, and after shocking everyone by its expression towards you, she proceeded to love and adore you with an impetuosity that made her perform the most frantic acts of self-humiliation and atonement."

"That was not so much for love of me, Sir Brough, but to show herself as unlike a Moffat as possible."

"I did not admire her for it ; the matter might have been arranged much more in accordance with your wishes, and quite as effectually, if

she had made less fuss and parade. By the-bye, did she ever ask how you came into the possession of that scorched and rescued parchment?"

"Yes, but I begged her to excuse my telling her."

"I should not have cared, Mother Hubbard, if you had told her."

"I dare say not; but I did not desire to humble her before her son."

"She was soaring on such lofty clouds of virtue, that I dare say she would have welcomed another mortification as a great favour. I have no opinion of people who are always in extremes."

"You feel aggrieved, then, Buffy, by her conduct on that day?"

"On that day, and on all other days, she never did me any credit. She was either remarkably ill-natured or overwhelmingly fond. And she had no right to smudge the name of Lanton with such uncalculated—such unnecessary obloquy, as she did then, by her flighty way of publishing her own crime. She might think a great deal of the name of Mallerdean, but she ought to have respected my name as well."

"Was that the reason you went into the army, Buffy, and left us for so many years?"

"Yes; and I should not have come home when I did, if she had been alive."

"I can hardly account for her death taking place so early in life. She was little more than forty."

"She was ten years older than Uncle Peter; she looked younger than she was. Your little blue-eyed women bear their age very well. She lived quite long enough."

"Buffy! Sir Brough!"

"I mean nothing unfeeling. She took a great deal out of herself from her earliest years, owing to her tempers. Therefore she could not expect to live as long as you and I, whose sweetness of disposition is quite remarkable. I expect we shall both live to be a hundred."

"I do not care to live to that age."

"Don't tell me! the vanity of old age is quite as strong, if not stronger than that of youth. Did I not see you blush like a girl, only the other day, and all for this? Somebody guessed your age to be sixty—and Cousin Peter said, 'No, I am sixty, and as my mother and I cannot both be sixty, she has kindly gone on to eighty.'"

"And so I was, Buffy—eighty years old on the 22nd of last June.")

## CHAPTER XLV.

## THE DUTIES OF THE QUEEN.



AND so I went back to live at Mallerdean.

People congratulated me, but I could not rejoice in the change. In my little cottage I endured life with composure—in the great House I was simply miserable. We lived secluded, as we were in deep mourning for Sir Brough. My father and mother had not been able to come for little Lotty, because of an infectious fever that had appeared in the parish, and they did not think it right to run the risk of bringing the seeds of it with them to us. So, after a time, having made my mother happy by the report of her little darling, I took her to visit Sissy and Philip. Afterwards we adventured over the water to see Hythe and Marblette. It was my first separation from my son, since his father had left us.

"Dulce," said Marblette to me one day, "you are less resigned now than you were when I risked so much to come to see you. Why is it so?"

"I do not know that I am less resigned," said I; "but I am conscious of a want of energy—of a listless, apathetic feeling. I thought the sight of you would remove it."

"You have been overworn. Your eyes have a weary, hopeless look, which they had not when I saw you last."

"I miss my boy. By-the-bye, his little wife promises to be all my heart could wish. Don't be uneasy about me, Marblette. After all, I think my present mood arises from the weakness of human nature."

"You are supposed to be above that."

"Marblette! have you forgotten the impulsive, wayward Dudu? If you oblige me to look into myself, I fear that there is both weakness and foolishness at the bottom of my listless depression; I have nothing more to struggle or to hope for. While I was the object of my sister Emma's aversion and persecution, there was a certain excitement always in store for me. There was also a pleasing feeling, knowing that I was a martyr for her sake. I almost enjoyed being half penniless, because I thought that I was suffering and keeping silence to save her good name; and it was done for Peter's sake, too, though I was disobeying his will—it was to save a Mallerdean from exposure. Of course I can see now that it was will-worship, and doing evil that good might come; but while it lasted, it occupied me, and was a comfort. Now she is very fond of me, and is as extravagant in her admiration as she used to be in her aversion—so there is not now anything to distract my thoughts from the weight of my ever-present sorrow. Besides, she will do nothing upon the estate without my approval, and that torments me. I only want to be left in peace; let her reign—she likes it, and

is used to it. I am no longer poor—I can wish for nothing that I do not have it. Thus, if I am discontented, I am my own self-tormentor.”

“I do not wish to make you more perfect than you are, so I allow there may be something in what you say. Nevertheless, I cannot but think living at Mallerdean is too much for a fervid disposition such as yours is.”

“It was so at first; but I mean to make it of use to me when I return. I shall try to take up the life and duties that are now allotted to me. My rest and seclusion are taken away, lest I should try to make my tabernacle, and dwell in the shadow of my own will. Ill-natured as the world is said to be, it loves and admires as impetuously as it hates, and I am at present an object which the world round me delights to honour. Generally to be overrated brings with it the curbing influence; to have all men speaking well of one is a great peril, but for me, living at Mallerdean, if I so far gain my spirits as to swim high with the tide—if the subtle poison creeps into my heart to make me take pleasure in this homage—if I forget to ask myself whether I deserve it or not—I have but to step out at my own door—to look at that archway, at that stone, and the Almighty will have a humbled, trembling, penitent mourner at His throne on the instant.”

“Well, dear Dulce, I believe strength will be given, will equal your desire to do the thing that is right, in whatever position you may be placed. But do not grow scrupulous; it is not good to worry your conscience by always asking it questions.”

“I feel better for this confession, at all events. What do you think of dear Lotty?”

“She is an excellent, sensible little thing. I observe she loses no opportunity of occupying her mind, to keep herself from dwelling on the past. Yesterday she said to me: ‘I have had a great shock; but I am Dulce’s sister—I must endure as she does, courageously. I am no longer going to live only for myself; I shall try to understand everything I see, and to learn whatever may be good. Thus in time I shall be fit to amuse papa, and able to assist mamma. I shall be their friend and companion in their old age.’”

“Dear quaint little pet! She seems now to have a horror of the other sex—of the thought of marriage.”

“Yes, she seems to hold all male things in dread, except her father and brother; and I am persuaded she would feel more confidence in them if they wore petticoats!”

And so for this time our discourse ceased.

Marblette had four children, her twin daughters, and two little sons, the youngest eight months old.

“Now,” says she, one day, “you see my family. I shall never have any more than those four children.”

“Why not?” I asked, smiling, willing to humour her, as I saw she wanted to beguile me into conversations such as we had held of old.



"I dreamt it."

"Oh! no, Marblette," I exclaimed, shuddering.

"It was a day-dream, Dulce. The mantle of Nurse Alexander must fall upon much worthier shoulders than mine. Do you never feel a conviction or glimmer of the future? This I call a day-dream. It is kin to, but not the same as, intuition. Lotty has been telling me she felt a consciousness of antipathy to a certain Countess Harmann, which feeling has been justified by a sad discovery concerning her. Now, my perceptions have nothing to do with the present. They are prophetic. I have two sons and two daughters, and I have no love left in my heart for any more; so I make much of this, my baby son, because I shall never have another to play with."

I may as well say here, that Marblette's day-dream was a true one.

I find in myself rather a love of an unseen influence. The feeling that Peter was always near me, and which was so great a comfort to me, was born of my love for him. But this faith in presentiment—this belief in dreams, and the workings of intuition, I encouraged, not so much from superstition—or a weak credulity—but because they seemed to be links between heaven and earth. They had a purity and goodness belonging to them that emanated, as I thought, from the ministering of angels. In the life that was before me I foresaw the necessity of being occupied much with my own thoughts—dwelling in an inner world which might seem visionary and enthusiastic to those around me, but was to me like hidden manna, nourishing my heart, and keeping me from worldly vanity, and from setting value on the things of the world amongst which I had to live. This habit kept me separate in the midst of the world to which I had to return; it kept up an inner spiritual life, which was not, I think, without its good influence on those who lived with me.

I could not but think that my sister Emma was already under the influence of this mysterious power, and has been so ever since the time I had said to her:

"Hush! Peter will not like it."

Since our reconciliation, she was ever in the habit of saying, "Peter sees this—he will be glad we are doing this." And this was a comfort to me, and made a bond of union between us, otherwise I know not how we could have lived together, to have been mixed up with all the miserable little annoyances that so hasty a temper kept her continually embroiled in, would have been intolerable. As it was, she never expected me to take part in her feuds; and although her own judgment and common sense had no power to stem the torrent of her temper, a little hint of what might be the true reason of the thing that she was taking in vexation, a gentle suggestion as to the probable end of the matter, or even the show of a slight disdain for so paltry an affair, worked with subtle influence on her mind, and by degrees lifted it in a great measure above them.

During the year that followed Sir Brough's death, we had **no** visitors.

only relations occasionally to see us, and these were mostly mine. Her character became gradually softened by communion with people who were more intellectual than she had been accustomed to associate with, and whose tempers were under such habitual control, they gave hers no cause to rise; and she began to see it was wrong to speak bitter words, and that

“A small unkindness is a great offence.”

The time of seclusion passed. As my boy grew older, she represented to me that it would be right to keep up the position and influence of the family, and she proposed that we should resume something of our former state and mode of living. I yielded to her counsel.

We resumed our place in the world. We again went to London at certain stated times. We opened Mallerdean to visitors—we entertained and received a good deal of company, and took our place as people of consequence, the leaders of society in our county. As for me, being my son's guardian, I laboured hard to understand the politics of my country, and I endeavoured to draw round me all the most cultivated and intelligent people I could make acquaintance with. We were a good deal courted for one thing or another—for a little credit soon swells, and the multitude are to the full quite as ready to praise as blame, if the tide sets that way.

The Prime Minister, whom I knew in society, came to visit us at Mallerdean; of course he came, if not wholly, at least half for politics. He acknowledged that he was afraid of the two dames of Mallerdean. A general election was imminent, and if we two were minded to set up a candidate, he feared the county would lose the valuable services of Colonel Moffat. He half laughingly asked, “Could he not bribe us to let matters rest until the young heir of Mallerdean was of age? A baronetcy for him, the rank of a baronet's wife for me?—would that win our adhesion?”

“My boy shall answer for himself,” I replied confidently; and the pretty fellow, now eight years old, came at my bidding to give his reply.

“Do you know who I am?” asked our guest.

“Yes, his Majesty's Prime Minister.”

“You know, then, that I am powerful, and can make a grand little man of you, and a lady of your mother.”

“My mother is a lady already, and I am Peter Mallerdean—with your leave, sir.”

“That is very well said—because it is not uttered with a pert or conceited air—but as if you knew Peter Mallerdean was a good and honoured name. Now I will make you Sir Peter—if you like.”

“No—if you will excuse me, sir—when I grow up, and have done something to deserve it of my country, the Whigs will make me Lord of Mallerdean.”

"So you are ambitious. Would you not like to be 'My Lord' at once?"

"I must earn the title; and I may not take a favour from you, sir—though I thank you all the same—because no Mallerdean ever accepted anything from a Tory—but the pleasure of doing him a kindness."

"Upon my word, Madam, you are tutoring your boy in such a fashion that I shall have to love my natural-born enemy. Will your little Whig lips vouchsafe me a kiss?"

The little fellow, with quite a pretty grace, knelt on one knee and kissed his hand—upon which the Minister raised him on to his knee, and kissed him more than once on his fair open brow.

When he was taking his departure, the Minister said to me,  
"You need envy no one, Madam, with such a son."

## CHAPTER XLVI.

### HIS GRACE OF ARDMORE.



WHEN the dissolution of Parliament took place, we did our best to realize the fears of the Minister so far as our interest went.

The two dames of Mallerdean, though they did not go canvassing as aforetime, had gained an influence that was nearly all-powerful.

Buffy was just a little too young for us to bring him forward at so momentous a time. Besides, he was away in Flanders with his regiment. Dear obstinate fellow! Not all my coaxings, entreaties, commands, had deterred him from entering the army almost immediately after his father's death. I had thought his determination to do so was because of the grief he felt at his loss, and the monotonous life he led afterwards, so different from that to which he had been accustomed. No excitement now about his Mother Hubbard—no employment to please her or his father. But the real reason has given himself—a few pages back.

So, in default of Buffy, we set up the Hon. Edgar Plumetts, eldest son of Lord Harpendale, and of course we gained the election.

I am afraid we did not owe it wholly to the pure spirit of Whiggism. Colonel Moffat lost his election as much from the rumours that were now pretty rife in the country regarding his private character, as from the influence of the dames of Mallerdean. That is a feeling of which England may well be proud—the natural, honest, and outspoken abhorrence of the character of a *roué*.

Not that Colonel Moffat cared much either about his ill-repute or the loss of his seat in Parliament. His uncle had fallen into ailing

health, and there was every prospect that Colonel Moffat would take his place in the Upper House ere long.

We were startled to learn—just as men were expecting to hear that all Lord Ardmore's honours, titles and magnificence were lost in the grave—that he was using every influence he possessed with the Crown and the Minister to be made a Duke.

The hand that moved him could be no other than that of his nephew; for if Lady Ardmore had been alive, she would not have permitted the sixth Marquis of Ardmore to be merged into the first duke. She was a proud woman, but her pride was grafted on a great deal of good sense.

In fact, it was pretty clear to all men that, if the dukedom was not conferred in the lifetime of his uncle, there was little hope that Col. Moffat would ever obtain it.

He worked hard, he memorialised, he entreated, he cajoled, he bullied his uncle to do the same.

So one week we read—

"It is His Majesty's greatest pleasure to confer upon Henry More, commonly styled Marquis of Ardmore, Baron of More, and a Baronet of the Irish Empire, Lord-Lieutenant, &c., &c., the dignity, style, and title of the Duke of Ardmore, &c., &c., &c."

And the following week the papers were equally sententious in announcing the death of the new duke.

"You don't mean to tell me," wrote Buffy, "that 'Moppet' has become a duke! Whatever is Dame Fortune about? Has she lost her head?—or is the world in that extraordinary condition? It seems as though Fortune feels it hopeless to reward merit—she contents herself with emptying her cornucopia haphazard over the world, and so a coronet has fallen upon 'Moppet.'"

Two months after the death of the first duke, the second was, to the great wonderment of the Dames of Mallerdean, ushered into their presence.

Lady Lanton at once rose and asked peremptorily to what we owed the honour, unexpected and unsolicited, of a visit from him.

He had no desire, he said, in his soft and insinuating manner, to excite her displeasure. When a person occupied a position like his in the county, he humbly thought his visit could not be considered an insult.

"Position in the county, truly! Because your birth made you Marquis of Ardmore, and those fools the Tories turned you into a duke, do you suppose that honest men and women will feel flattered by your visits? Let me tell you, once for all, that his Grace the Duke of Ardmore need never expect to be admitted on any terms at Mallerdean."

"Allow me to hope," said he, turning to me, "that you do not participate in these sentiments."

"I so far agree with them that I trust your Grace will be content

with as scant an intercourse here as is consistent with civility, and nothing more."

"You refuse, then, to be friends," said he; "as Queen of the County, your duty is to be on neighbourly terms with all the inhabitants of it."

"I do not intend to fail in my duty. Your Grace will find that I can be courteous without taxing your time and attentions."

"In other words, you mean to keep up the barest intercourse with me; and, whilst refusing to quarrel, you will leave me freezing on the confines of a bow when we meet, and a curtsy when we part. This will not do for me—may I speak with you alone?"

"Do you care, Dulce, to be tormented with him longer?" said Lady Lanton, looking at me. "If you do, I will not leave you."

"I think you may safely leave me. Colonel Moffat never had the power to torment me, and I hardly think the Duke of Ardmore will be more successful."

But I was mistaken. He made me a formal offer of his hand, his heart, and his new title. The man had so mean a mind that he fancied there was something wholly irresistible to the female heart in the magic title "Your Grace."

"Sir," I exclaimed, indignantly, "I have not lost the remembrance that I was to be your sister."

"You must be conscious that I desired to be allied to you on any terms. Your sister refused me absolutely. I think better of you than to suppose that I was lowered in your eyes by her refusal. As Mrs. Mallerdean, I acknowledge you bore a higher position in the county than you would have done as Mrs. Moffat. But the Duchess of Ardmore can take her place all over the world, few above her in rank, and, if you are she, none above her in beauty and grace."

"I beg your Grace to let this interview conclude—if this conversation be prolonged, I fear I may forget the laws of courtesy. It seems to me already that what you mean as a compliment, takes the form of an insult. Let us part. I will forget what you have said, and the civility which must be carried on between us, as members of the same society, shall not be broken by me, if you, on your part, will remember what is due to the widow of Peter Mallerdean."

"And you prefer that title to the one I offer?"

"God has given me that title, and I mean to wear no other."

"Is that your answer? Have you no thought for a fellow-creature? Can you not find one iota of interest for a poor sinner, who, tempest-tossed in the whirlwinds of passion and sin, feels—knows—oh, Dulce, implores you to save him! You can be to me that better angel."

"Hush, we have both of us arrived at that time of life when the bombast of words is rated at its true value. You are, and always

have been, a selfish man. If you have not strength of mind to throw off your sins and save your own soul, no other mortal can do it. I pray God to give you strength to do it. Let me pass !”

“Not until you have heard my alternative. You say I am selfish, that very self it is that urges me to sue thus humbly for your favour. You scorn the rank I offer you—you have scarcely courteous words to refuse my love—and you have not even the mercy we are enjoined to show towards one another. Am I to understand that you are inexorable—that time will not soften you—that no amount of submission will subdue you—that I am not even to be entitled to so much as your friendship ?”

“If it is necessary that this self, which you worship, should be answered as plainly as these questions are put, I am inexorable. Time but increases my love for the dead—submission but adds contempt to my dislike for you. I only desire so much of your friendship as will make you remember to keep out of my way.”

“Is it so ?”

And here his passion was so appalling that I might have been alarmed had I cared much for my life.


“Woman, how you madden me ! and you stand there so calm, so immovable ! I might kill you, and you would smile—you would be glad, for you would think you were going to rejoin that Peter Mallerdean whom I hate ! No, you shall live. I know how to revenge myself. I will make that pale cheek blush—those steadfast eyes droop. Yes, Queen of the County, I’ll enter the lists against you. We shall see if the Duchess of Ardmore, whom I shall introduce, cannot pay off some old scores for me, due to Mrs. Mallerdean. We will have a tussle for the county. When your son is of age, let him try to take his father’s place—let him dare to stand for an election—and see if I do not thwart him ! I will pain your heart through him.”

I rang the bell as my reply, and upon the servant appearing, left him, without further leave-taking.

I thought that had those who created the dukedom of Ardmore seen the possessor of this honour during this interview with me, they would have been rather ashamed of their *protégé*.

## CHAPTER XLVII.

## THE QUEEN'S DILEMMA.

T was just about this time that the whole country was in an uproar. The dissemination of the seeds of the French Revolution were even now rising and flowering on the smallest occasion. The public mind seized every opportunity for demanding change of some kind. The long tenure of the Tories in office, their determination to withstand every innovation, the insanity of the king, and the gloomy prospects of England, fermented in the minds of the people, until the incipient discontent broke out into serious riots.

The military were billeted in all the great towns. Timid people fortified their houses, and many of the aristocracy had stands of arms sent to them from the Tower, and exercised their servants, retainers, and tenants in the use of them, as if feudal times had come again. The burning of one or two towns, the sacking of a great house, and other riotous acts, were so promptly visited by military authority, that the disaffection seemed to be stifled as speedily as it had risen ; but it as speedily broke out again. The country was like a surging sea.

Fortunately a somewhat sad impression of what a revolution engendered in happy homes and quiet firesides was left on the minds of all who had been brought in contact with the unfortunate French refugees.

Nearly every town in England sheltered some of them. There might be seen the fastidious, fanciful, old French beau, now perhaps reduced to gain the merest pittance by teaching dancing ; his sensitive nerves, his refined tastes, all outraged by the blowsy, broad-footed, thick-ankled country "mees" whom he had undertaken to make elegant and graceful.

There was the unfortunate, helpless, indolent, shrill-voiced countess, who shivered at the English east-winds, and was frozen by the English *sang-froid*. And many more could be added.

If these sights did not warn the English nation to avoid the mighty unrootings of revolution, they deserved a still more deplorable fate.

It was at this period that the common-sense of the nation, enunciated through the voice of her most gifted patriots, righted the vessel of the State, and brought her into smoother water.

For us at Mallerdean, we, personally, were not so much affected as other less fortunate counties. We pursued our way, visited and fêted each other, held all the public meetings, and carried on all the different matters of the county, just as if the country was in the deepest repose of peace and comfort.

The Ritsons were beaming over with happiness and all sorts of

kindly enthusiasms. Mr. Beaume had now taken the place of the "Beauty" in their hearts. He was their Beauty; their idol. "Charles" was the watch-word of the family, as Agnes had been before. Charles was so handsome, so gentlemanlike—had quite the look of the aristocracy. Clarissa was so fortunate—most fortunate—the luckiest of girls!

Fortunately, both Mr. and Mrs. Beaume were well aware of the weakness of the Ritsons; they knew they must have an idol—they must have something about which to rave. Dear, good creatures! if they had not made their pulses flow by these little enthusiasms, they would not have been half so healthy nor so pleasant!

By-and-bye, when a little Charles, a Clarissa, and some half-dozen more babies, appeared at the rectory, and trotted in due time between it and the Ritsons' house, their hands were full. They glowed over every fresh baby as if Clarissa had obliged them with it—entirely out of kindness.

But it was curious to see how prim and auntish they were to a gawky boy of the name of Knolls, whom, after immense discussions and many upbraiding letters from Agnes, they had at last permitted to be sent to them.

Agnes, never wise, and now at the acme of silliness, had written an account of this her eldest son, which might have done extremely well to describe a young prince of the blood. Her Billy was the handsomest, cleverest, most gentlemanly of boys—"her princely Billy!"

"Where does he get that from?" observed Anne; he may be handsome, because he resembles his mother,—but how he comes to be both clever and gentlemanly, when one remembers who was his father, is a thing, sisters, I can't account for."

When the "princely Billy" arrived, a wail of dismay ran through the whole sisterhood.

"A moon-faced, gaping young cub—" so his grandfather styled him, with whitish hair, falling into round, whitey-blue eyes, uncouth manners, freckled skin, and an incapability of speaking English—such was this princely Billy! Mr. and Mrs. Knolls had settled at Nuremberg, where Lord Hythe had obtained for him an excellent appointment in the Royal stables—so that Billy's ignorance of his mother-tongue was not so much his fault as his misfortune.

Mrs. Knolls described herself as the happiest of woman-kind; she was not given, like her sisters, to little enthusiasms—her temperament was that of indolent content. But when writing of her home, her Knolls, her young princes and princesses, she dipped her pen in the ink of rapture. They were all, in their several ways, perfection! This state of things greatly contented the Ritsons.

"We shall never forget our obligations to you, Mrs. Mallerdean, for proposing it, and Lord Hythe for obtaining this appointment for Knolls, and for making Agnes like it so much."

"But I cannot lay claim to that good. Agnes was wise enough to



like it without any making. I hear she wonders how any one can live in England if they have the chance to live abroad."

"Yes, and when one reads of the fearful goings on in those parts, I am amazed at her. I certainly don't wish Agnes to get into any danger; but I do hope she will stick where she is, let her be ever so frightened. We cannot have any more children like that dreadful Billy coming over here, and mixing with the little Beaumes. There is no saying what horrible things he may be repeating with that gibberish language of his."

"We none of us understand him, so we must hope they will get no harm."

As for dear Lady Joyce, she was just going down that hill which can never be climbed twice. But she had plenty of nurses. There was always a little pale, meek thing called Cator, hovering about her; and she had a *protégé*, whose promise as a future artist she was never weary of foretelling.

"Take very great care of those drawings, dear Mrs. Mallerdean. Some of these days they will be sought for as hidden treasure, and you will be envied as the possessor of so many of the earliest efforts of the celebrated artist, Cator."

What had become of the Cator papa and mamma? I never distinctly heard. Of Adrian Levassue I heard too often. A more consistent beggar, I suppose, never existed. It did not appear to signify what he undertook to do, where he settled, or how much was done to start him in some fresh scheme, time after time, he always reappeared upon the scene in a more woe-begone state than he was lifted out of before.

I conclude he troubled the Duke of Ardmore quite as much as he did me, but not being on speaking terms with his grace, I could not vouch for it with certainty.

That nobleman took his revenge. It was, like himself, a very poor one, and recoiled to his own disadvantage.

Within six months after his interview with me, the world of Mallerdean heard the news of the Duke of Ardmore's intended marriage.

Who was to be the Duchess of Ardmore, sent that world into paroxysms of curiosity.

It is always a disadvantage to a county to have a large house without a mistress; and when it comes to be a Ducal establishment without a Duchess, the whole neighbourhood feels aggrieved. Thus the news that this serious evil was about to be remedied, and the whole county was to be made happy and exulting by the possession of a Duchess, sent everybody to every other body to discuss the matter, and to congratulate each other.

But by-and-bye whispers crept about, which seemed to insinuate we were threatened with a Duchess with whom, perchance, we might scarcely like to claim acquaintance.

Was it the Countess Harmann? No. Methought I should have

been glad had it been so. But we knew she was not to be Duchess. We had heard of her a little, but that little was too much.

The county races were about to take place. As became us, we had filled Mallerdean with company for the occasion. Some magnates from London, as was proper, that our county neighbours might see some of those mighty people who ruled the world, either of politics or fashion, and on seeing them, wonder they were so little different from themselves. Some of my married sisters came to me, and we had Hythe and Marblette, to whom I had lent Dulce Domum for six months. Marblette was so provoking as not to keep pace with me in point of age. She looked as young and as lovely as when first she married. To be sure, she was scarcely thirty, a very pretty age for English women.

We were altogether a goodly company, to shine forth at the races. There was the Mallerdean barouche, with its four greys, the bewigged old coachman driving, and two outriders. Then followed the Lanton coach—four bays, also driven. Afterwards the Mallerdean chariot, with its four greys. On these were two postilions. This was followed by a mail Phaeton, driven by Lord Hythe, with a very handsome pair of black mares in it, famous for trotting. Afterwards my pony-carriage.

The trumpeters had never carried their trumpets, nor announced our arrival on the race-course, since there had been no master at Mallerdean. We went there in state, as became the dignity of the house, but we took our places in silence, as was the fitting etiquette of our sex.

But we are not at the races yet. I must first tell about the Duke of Ardmore's marriage.

As the time approached, and it became generally understood that the Duke intended to present his bride to the county at the races, and at the ball afterwards, the excitement was prodigious.

Old Lord and Lady Harpendale took the trouble to come all the way to Mallerdean to hold a consultation about it. The Orams came also, by appointment, and many others besides.

"I mistrust the Duke," said one. "If the future Duchess be a proper person to present to the county, why don't we hear her name?"

"He means to marry some one of a doubtful sort, and to bring her suddenly down to the races, to force the county to acknowledge her before they know who she is."

"I came through Mallerdean on purpose, and found, from George himself, that all the carriages are being done up. Magnificent harness has come from town, with strawberry leaves emblazoned on every spare inch of leather, and teams of such splendid carriage-horses have passed through on their way to Ardmore, the like has not been seen in this county for years, if at all."

"It is a very awkward position for you, my dear Dulce, as 'Queen

of the County,' and no male protector to stand by you," said Lady Harpendale.

"Oh! don't fear, Mrs. Mallerdean, if we find she is not what we should like, we will back you up," exclaimed Lord Oram.

"But how am I to discover if she is what you fear? I shall not be able to tell from her face if she ought to be recognised, for none of us would wish to judge her merely by her appearance. If she is counterfeit (we know enough of the Duke to be sure she is neither old nor ugly)—if she is more, of quite the lower orders, still, being respectable, we have no right to withhold the welcome of the county from her."

"Pooh! pooh, Dulce," said Lady Lanton, "nobody noticed Mr. Carter when he married his cook—why should we notice Moffat's wife, though she is a Duchess?"

"Mr. Carter's wife had lost her character, Emma; we all admire and esteem Lady Joyce. I am almost inclined to pity this unknown duchess, for I feel certain that, if her husband brings her down here suddenly amongst us, she will be very little prepared for the ordeal that is before her, and he, probably, will not tell her anything about it. It is obvious that there must be something to make us fear in the matter, for none of the public papers, and apparently none of his own people at Ardmore, are able to say who she is."

"Edgar is to be at home to-morrow night, Mrs. Mallerdean," said Lord Harpendale, "and he will bring us the latest news from the clubs. Something must have oozed out about her there, or I am much mistaken."

"I will drive over the following day to hear it. Anxious as we all are to have no one thrust upon us, whose acquaintance we should blush to own, still I feel sure no one wishes to hurt unnecessarily the feelings of so young a bride. To be married to-day, and appear in public to-morrow, which appears to be the Duke's design, makes her an object of compassion to me."

"Remember your duties as queen, Dulce," said Lady Lanton again, "and don't let your bump of benevolence inflict upon us the acquaintance of an improper woman, though she may come in the guise of a duchess."

And Emma tried to look severely upon me, but, as was her wont, she finished by kissing me heartily, and calling me

"Dear thing!"

I went over to Harpendale, as I had appointed. Lady Lanton did not accompany me; she was already beginning to suffer from the first symptoms of the illness that eventually killed her. A weakness in the chest made a long drive in an east wind very unfit for her. Besides, she was bent upon keeping herself perfectly strong and well for the great battle that was impending over us.

I did not feel justified in telling any one of the superior knowledge I possessed of the Duke's intentions, contained in his threat to me

It seemed in so important a matter to be much better that the Mallerdean world should act upon their own responsibility, than from any hint they might receive from me. This left me free.

Mr. Plumetts brought down news which confirmed all our worst suspicions. It was reported in the clubs that the Duke had gone to some notorious house, and offered to make the prettiest girl in it Duchess of Ardmore. It was not likely that he had been refused.

The question was now mooted, whether, if this report proved true, the insult intended for the county ought to be met by its queen. It seemed a question that the gentlemen of the county alone could deal with.

"For Heaven's sake, my dear Mrs. Mallerdean," said Lady Harpendale, taking me aside, "insist upon your prerogatives. It is a woman we are about to put down, and a woman alone should do it. If we leave it to the men, of course it must end in duels and bloodshed. Not a household will be safe."

"I have no opinion of the Duke's valour," said I; "but, at the same time, if it be the wish of the ladies of the county that I should resent this insult for them, I am willing to do so."

"No one can do it better, I feel sure."

"It is absolutely necessary that I should know the name of the person he marries, and ascertain beyond all doubt who and what she really is."

"Good Lord! my dear," interrupted Mrs. Plumetts, who was a strong-minded woman, "look upon her as not married at all. That is what I advise."

"He may introduce a fictitious wife to us," observed Lady Harpendale.

"It is so necessary that I should be certain of all this. If he desires to make us look foolish, you may rest assured he will have more than one way of doing so. Supposing I regarded her as not married, and it is proved that she is married, I should have to apologise. This he would like. Then, again, if I am not certified that she is this person Mr. Plumetts describes, I am in a still worse condition—I shall insult an honest woman."

"All you say is very true, and I cannot help feeling very much for you, my dear," said Lady Harpendale; "still, if you are not equal to the occasion, who is? We shall have to fall back upon the gentlemen."

"We have five days left before the ball; we can easily avoid any introduction or recognition on the race-course, as we can each sit in our own carriage and refrain from visiting the grand stand. There is nothing remarkable in this, as we have done so before. I fancy he will make no attempt to introduce her, until, as is customary, any newcomer into the county is brought up and formally introduced to the Queen at the ball. He will then think that none of the ladies of the county can escape."

"It may be as you say; but the whole thing makes me terribly nervous. I think, my dear Dulce, you must not count on seeing me."

"You might appear for half an hour, dear Lady Harpendale, he may construe your absence into a bias on his side."

"Good Lord! mamma," broke in the impulsive Mrs. Plumetts, "you must go—the whole county must go—and support their Queen."

So, like many a meeting before, and many a one since, we discussed the matter to little purpose. As I was driving home I recollected that Mrs. Arcot, poor Mary's mother, had a sister living in London, and in the very street which Mr. Plumetts had mentioned as the one where the house was situated from whence the Duke was reported to have chosen his bride.

Feeling the importance of time, I ordered my horse, and with my little son for a companion, we rode up that evening to Yeoman Miles, for Mrs. Arcot had lived with him as housekeeper since her daughter's death.

## CHAPTER XLVIII.

### THE DUKE'S REVENGE.



R. MILES had continued, as years went on, to devote himself to me and mine with the utmost constancy and affection. So eager was he to oblige, that, upon hearing my dilemma, he insisted upon sending Mrs. Arcot to London at his own charge; and made her bustle off, to get ready, preparing to drive her down himself to meet the night-mail. This went through Mallerdean about half-past eight in the evening, and arrived in London soon after five in the morning.

Miles was half inclined to go himself, but said he—

"I don't know how it be, but if I want a nice business done quietly, I always gets a woman to do it. Men ain't of no account when a thing's ticklish."

Which this undoubtedly was.

We were late in getting home, but Emma was well satisfied with our activity and arrangements.

Mrs. Arcot, on her return, was to take a glass coach from Mallerdean, and drive straight up to us at the House, from whence we engaged to send her home.

She had not returned when we set off with that grand cavalcade to the first day's races.

Such was the commotion of the public mind, that none of us paid much attention to the races until it became certain that no equipages from Ardmore appeared on the course.

When I arrived at home I found Mrs. Arcot waiting my return.

This was her tale, which I repeat with only a sprinkling of Mrs. Arcot's idioms and homely remarks :

"She arrived at her sister's house in due time, and satisfying her as to the cause of her sudden appearance, they both engaged at once in the endeavour to obtain the necessary information. The sister knew for certain the house bore the worst character. To use her own phrase, 'No respectable body ever went inside it, and none ever came out who wasn't the worse.' Mrs. Arcot watched incessantly the whole of one day, and saw the Duke of Ardmore drive up to the door and go in. But it being in the gloom of the evening, to make sure, she did, as she said, violence to her feelings, and went and rung at the door-bell. When it was answered she asked to see the Duke of Ardmore. The servant was startled, and asked how she knew he was there?

" 'I saw him drive by and enter the house, and being in London on a matter of business concerning a nephew who wants to get into the Post-office, I thought bold to ask his Grace's influence. My name is Arcot. He will know it.'

" 'Wait here, and I will go and see.'

" Presently she returned, and said laughing—

" 'He knew the name well enough, but he could not be bored then by business.'

" 'Well, perhaps not, answered Mrs. Arcot; 'she was very sorry she had disturbed him, as perhaps he was with his bride. She had seen in the public papers he was married, or going to be.'

" 'Not married yet,' said the maid laughing; 'and it's odds if he will be. But if you are curious on the matter, go to that church yonder to-morrow morning at seven o'clock, then you'll know for certain.'

" 'Thank you, ma'am,' says Mrs. Arcot. 'I hope she is a nice lady. They are particular folks down in our county, and set great store by manners and birth.'

" 'As for manners,' answered the maid, 'Lucy Kent has been having a deal o' tutoring; but as for birth, that won't magnify when she's a Duchess.'

So Lucy Kent was the name; and that Mrs. Arcot might be certain of her character, she made inquiries in one direction, and her sister in another, and discovered quite enough of Lucy Kent to make our course clear. She was described as a pretty, fair girl, genteel-looking and slim, but more bold and depraved than she dared to describe. Mrs. Arcot took good care to be not only at the church, but in it. It was opened very early, "By reason," said the clerk, "that the gentleman who was to be married would have no fuss. He had orders not to let two people in at a time. Mrs. Arcot was admitted, upon the supposition she was one of the bridal party.

"They do tell me as he is a Dook," said the clerk; "but I am thinking that's a lark of the girls. They is up to anything, is they girls

out of that house. As if a Dook would get up at seven to be married !”

She saw the marriage take place. The girl, or bride, was just what had been described to her. Mrs. Arcot was inclined to weep over her, as bearing some slight resemblance to her dear Mary. But she lost that impression the moment the ceremony was over. She had placed herself near the door, rather out of sight. They were too much engaged in talking to notice her. She heard him say :

“ Now, Lu, if you don’t act your part well, and hold your own, I’ll divorce you !”

Her answer took away Mrs. Arcot’s breath. The likeness to her Mary instantly vanished. Never had she heard such words proceed from the mouth of a woman.

They left the church door in a hired carriage, but she was told that four miles out of town the Duke’s own carriage would be waiting, and that relays of horses were ordered to be in readiness all along the road to Ardmore, as he was going to introduce his bride at a grand county ball which was to be given the very next night, when all the great people of the county would be present.

Mrs. Arcot, having lost the mail coach for that day, employed her time in getting further information ; and as the tongues of the people in the bride’s last home had been pretty well loosened by that time, she obtained every particular we could wish concerning the antecedents of Lucy Kent.

We now arranged that the Duke’s first rebuff must be given by the Queen on the following night at the ball ; and if this had no effect upon him and his newly-made Duchess, she and the ladies should retire, and the gentlemen come forward and settle the affair as they thought best. I promised Lady Harpendale this should not happen unless the Duke pushed matters to extremities.

Among her own class this Lucy Kent, now Duchess of Ardmore, had ruled with powerful sway, by the right of a bold manner and an unabashed tongue. But I expected she would scarcely undergo the ordeal of finding herself in the company of ladies and gentlemen of character and position with the same effrontery.

I had scarcely taken my seat at the upper end of the ball-room, with all the principal ladies of the county seated on their sofas, the chief noblemen and gentlemen standing by them, when we heard a flourish of trumpets sound, which was not usual at the ball. At this moment a spirit of compassion took possession of me for this unfortunate victim of a bad man’s ill-temper, while at the same time a glow of indignation flushed my face at the possibility of a contention between her and me. Thus did two opposite feelings of our nature assail me ; but I had no time to think more of them, for the company parted on either side, and enabled me, and all who were at the upper end of the room, to see the Duke of Ardmore leading up a lady to greet us.

Certainly she was a handsome creature, and would have been lovely if she had only let nature speak for her, but she had dressed herself in a dress of extravagant gaudiness, made in the extremity of fashion. She was covered with several sets of different jewels, and as she advanced up the room she bridled her neck from side to side, and moved her hips and shoulders in a manner so affected and laughable, that she looked as though she were acting a burlesque part in a play.

But I could see her cheek flushing and paling, whilst the great glittering fan in her hand almost fell from her trembling fingers.

"All these airs and affectations are put on," I thought. "Poor wretch! she already flinches from the ordeal. Her bold spirit cowers before her judges. As she sees these noble and stately groups looking at her in dead silence, she feels that the spirit of the place is too strong for her; the composed, calm looks of displeasure which meet her on every side abash her boldness. She has entered a charmed circle, where her loudest tones would not dismay those who heard them, nor her basest words rouse any other feeling than a stately surprise. All the weapons which she had hitherto found so powerful she will not dare to use. She is already overawed at the aspect of women so different to any she ever encountered before; or of the gentlemen who are here with their wives, daughters, and sisters, to protect them from insult."

She was, no doubt, a woman of keen sagacity and ready wit. In the full flush of having been made a Duchess (we learnt she had been clever enough to insist upon being a *real* Duchess, as payment for the part she was called upon to act), her head had been a little turned; she had thought she could carry all before her. She only recognized her real position when she was too far advanced to recede.

Therefore, when her husband took her hand, and led her to me, saying:

"Madam, as Queen of the County, I introduce my wife, the Duchess of Ardmore, to you—"

She was pale as death; drops of perspiration were standing on her brow.

I rose. My seat was a little raised from the floor, and, bending down to her, without taking notice of the Duke's introduction, I said, in a low tone and gently,

"I think, madam, she who was Lucy Kent ought not to be here."

She looked up, scared, in my face.

"Who cares for that?" exclaimed the Duke, who overheard me; "she is now Duchess of Ardmore, and I claim for her the place to which her rank entitles her among this company."

"Madam," said I, unheeding him, "let me beg you to withdraw."

"My God! no—speak to her—Lu—"

"I am dashed!" she murmured; "take me away."



Seeing that we should have no further trouble with her, I turned to her husband and said,

"Am I to call the gentlemen to my aid, my Lord Duke—or will you permit the safer mediation of a woman to settle the matter of this insult which you have offered to the whole county?"

"What do you mean?" he exclaimed, flushing.

"Your intentions have not been kept as quiet as you imagined. We are aware of your design. In compassion to your newly-made Duchess, the county permits me to make known to her the impossibility of her admittance into our society. I have now done so—and she merits our gratitude for the readiness with which she has understood me. If you are not disposed to follow her example, the ladies will withdraw. And you cannot do a more obliging thing to the gentlemen present, than to give them an opportunity of resenting the insult you have offered their wives and daughters."

A shrill scream from the Duchess prevented a reply from the Duke. Seeing that she was going into hysterics, I handed my salts to the Master of Ceremonies, and he, with the help of another gentleman, bore her out of the room, followed by her husband.

Marblette asked Hythe's permission to go and offer her feminine succour, and he not only assented to her request, but he accompanied her himself.

She soon returned, saying that the Duke had ordered the carriage and had taken her home. Hythe added that her shriek and hysterics were symptoms more of wisdom than of illness. They were well-timed, and, in fact, the only means of putting a speedy end to the scene.

The ball then proceeded, though not with its usual spirit. We were all more or less affected by this extraordinary incident, which only a madman or a villain could have conceived and carried out.

No one would talk upon any other subject.

There was one day still to be spent on the race-course. It was generally the habit of the ladies of the county to assemble in great companies on the first day, to reserve themselves on the second, to be fresh for the ball—so the second day was the real sporting period, and only attended by gentlemen. On the day a little racing was only an excuse for the whole county to meet and talk over the ball.

On this third day I prepared to fulfil this the last duty of the week.

When we arrived there was a most gorgeous display of carriages from Ardmore, filled with a company that astonished us all.

Such an amount of finery had never before blazed out all at once as we saw now. The new Duchess being most conspicuous in a purple velvet bonnet and ermine mantle.

These carriages were all placed on the opposite side of the course to that generally appropriated to the gentry. I had not been half an hour in my place when a ragged urchin brought me the following note:—

"MADAM,—I wont ever trubble you, nor none of the ladies. I know I am not fitt. But I am married, and I mene to be a goode wife. Thank the lady who came oot to me. She maid me see wot a lady should be. I can never forgett her, or you, maddam, spaking so gentlie. I think if I wont a frend, I mite hope she will be won.

"Your humble servant,

"LUCY ARDMORE."

I was right in my conjecture that this young woman was shrewd and clever; perhaps, I thought, possessed of some good impulses, never yet drawn forth. She kept her word, and not only never intruded upon us, but restrained her husband from doing so either. So thus ended the Duke of Ardmore's revenge. She was a better wife than he deserved.

## CHAPTER XLIX.

### WINDING UP.



TEN years had passed since Sir Brough's death, and I was now sitting by his wife's dying couch.

She had been told that day of the probable termination of her illness.

The only words she had spoken since were,

"Dulce, do not leave me!"

Now, as the evening drew on, and the fever rose, which nightly gave her a semblance of renewed strength, only to leave her weaker than before, she bade me come and sit close to her.

"Dulce, do you remember once saying to me, 'Don't say such words—Peter will not like it?' I owe a peaceful death-bed to those words. I shall see Peter soon. I shall tell him how I have striven to be all that his sister ought to have been from the beginning. I shall tell him—or he may know it—I have seen you all along the desolate mourner you still are. Do not deny it. You smile, you laugh, you enter with eagerness into fresh employments, but still you are desolate, and I shall tell Peter so."

"He knows it."

"Well!—he knows it. But I have more to tell him. He has a son who bids fair to make the name of Mallerdean known beyond the circle in which we have hitherto moved, and this is owing greatly to his mother."

"He was a child of the rarest promise. Don't you remember what

was said of him by very high authority—and he only eight years old?”

“I do; and I think his own prophecy will come true—he will be Lord of Mallerdean.”

“He must deserve it.”

“I shall not live to see it. Nineteen years old now! I will give him ten years more to win this honour.”

“I should wish him to marry, and settle here, so as to relieve me of the care of the estate. I have no heart to be here without—without you.”

“Thank you, Dulce; that you will miss me is very sweet to me. How sweet, you can never know. Nor can you imagine the calm and peace that has come over me since I have heard that I am to die! If I had not changed, how different all would have been! I should not have dared to meet Peter. I have been thinking so much of those early days when he first brought you home. I always admired you, even when I hated you; I could not help it. That day that I raised my hand against you, and you caught me up, and carried me off, I thought I had never seen anything so lovely as your flushed face—your imperious, disdainful air. Now, don’t stop me; I like to recall all these things. You may think it odd, but in my heart I felt proud that you belonged to us. And a good deal of the love and admiration I gave Marblette and Lotty was for your sake—dear little Lotty, she is very constant in her hatred of men! I wish she and Buffy would take to each other, but he seems as little to care for the maidens as she for the young men. He loves no woman but his Mother Hubbard. You don’t know how pretty you used to look in those days with this ugly boy hanging upon you. Now, tell me—I should like to know as much as I can before I go—whom do you wish Peter to marry—little Marblette? Well, I don’t know—I scarcely like cousins to marry.”

“He will please himself, you may be sure.”

“Yes, just as his father did, who was not to be persuaded into pledging himself to that unhappy Julia. Is she dead?”

“I think not. She went to Ardmore, I understood—begging, about three months ago.” (She had been to me also.)

“She was always extravagant and in debt,” said Lady Lanton; I have lent her large sums, but of course she knows better than to ask me now. How did she fare in her begging expedition?”

“The Duke, I heard, was bitter and hard, and drove her from the place; but the Duchess sent after her, and was very generous to her.”

“Fancy that Lucy Kent turning out such a fine character! Do you remember all that fuss we had about her coming to the Race Ball, and the unpleasant duty you had to perform? I remember being in such a rage with the woman! Now, I am glad to hear good of her.”

“You can hear nothing else. She was clever and full of strong sense. I saw that at this very ball. She thought to brag out the

matter as she was used to do among her companions ; but the sight of the grand assembly of courteous and high-bred ladies and gentlemen smote her at once with a sense of the tremendous difference between her and them. I should think she was naturally ambitious, and with a strong will—otherwise she would not have made the Duke marry her. This ambition and will made her long to be in manner and habits equal with this fine assembly, as she was now their equal in rank. She could never hope to be admitted among them, because of her antecedents ; but the womanly wish to be like them for her own sake, grew strong within her. Of course she was a long time about it, the more so as she had no ladies to associate with her. The birth of her children was a still stronger motive. She went through all the regular drudgery of education for her own improvement. I wonder if she ever thinks of that scrawl she sent to me, on the race-course, the day after the ball ?”

“ I daresay she does. She writes to Marblette—does she not ?”

“ Yes ; and you never read anything so pretty, or in such good taste, as her letters. She will not ask advice of me, because I am in the county, and she will never suffer any lady in it, she says, to be pained by even the speaking to her—and so far she is right. But Marblette, living so much abroad, she can the easier communicate with her, and yet not outrage the proprieties of society.”

“ How does the Duke go on ?”

(Lady Lanton had been in the South of France for three years, so was not acquainted with all that had occurred in her absence.)

“ Much the same. He would have broken the heart of a sensitive person long ago, but this whilom Lucy Kent, with her strong sense, and firm will, and her gift of expressing herself forcibly, which she still retains, has kept him so far within bounds, that he is not absolutely disreputable. He is getting old now, or, at all events, aged, and her empire over him increases every day. He seems to be proud of his children. They are a handsome, strong, and healthy set—which advantages they owe to their mother, for the Ardmores have always been a poor, sickly race, no son ever inheriting direct after the father.”

“ That reminds me of a cruel speech I once made, Dulce, either to you, or to your father. I said that ‘ no Mallerdean ever lived three years at the same time with his heir.’ It was intensely wicked of me to say this, and may make you unhappy at some future day.”

“ I have not the least idea that it will ; I feel no uneasiness about it.”

“ Thank God for that. Perhaps in His mercy—for the sake of all your pious resignation, your never-failing fortitude—He may remit the curse.”

“ Amen.”

“ Do you ever remember feeling wicked, Dulce ?”

“ As a child, I was passionate and impetuous. I was something

like the old Mrs. Mallerdean, whose character, written by herself, I read to you the other day."

"She said—if I remember right—that she distinctly remembered feeling the 'something of her soul.' Now I never thought once upon the matter, or had, what I may call, a pious, religious thought, until you said, 'Don't say that, Peter will not like it.'"

"It was then that you realized the 'something of your soul.'"

"I should like to know what your early thoughts were, as a child?"

"I have written down my 'earliest recollections,' and will read them to you, if you desire it."

"I shall like it—I wish to know how that mind was moulded, that heart tutored to become what you are?"

It was in conversations such as this, that she, whom I had almost cursed as mine enemy, spent with me her last days on earth.

I much wished to send for Buffy. But his mother would not hear of it for some time.

"He does not care for me," said she; "and I do not wonder that he does not. I have not been a good mother to him ever. I want you, and you only, with me."

I really wanted Buffy's help and counsel, and I thought it right he should see his mother before she died. So I wrote to summon him, and he was in the house for some days before she knew of it. When she did, she was glad; and it was a comfort to both to spend those last days together.

Like all such illnesses, death came when I least expected it. She had been so much better, that Buffy had carried her into that little sitting-room so memorable always both to her and to me. She had lived in my room for some months, as I was her sole nurse at night.

"I shall die here, Buffy," she said; "and it is fit I should, with my eyes fixed on that escritoire."

Neither she nor I had ever uttered Peter's name, and Buffy tried to cheer her, saying, scoldingly,

"I shall carry you back if you are not pretty behaved."

"Pretty behaved," she whispered to herself—"pretty behaved—ah! Peter, are you near? do you think that now I am pretty behaved?" And then she seemed to doze. We watched her for half an hour, when suddenly she half rose; she smiled—it was an eager, joyful, yet half-anxious smile.

"Dulce, Dulce!" she murmured, "he is coming; he is here!—Peter, Dulce!" And no more. She was gone.

We laid the sister by the brother.

It was six weeks after this, that, passing over Mallerdean bridge in the carriage, no one fortunately in it but myself, and the two servants on the box, a large timber waggon, carelessly driven, struck the carriage with so much force that it was tilted over the parapet, and we all

fell into the canal. This canal was the one designed and formed by Peter, and to which the town of Mallerdean owed so much of its prosperity.

It had nearly been my grave. I was quite insensible when taken out of the water, and was carried to Dulce Domum, as nearer than Mallerdean.

It was then that I became aware how much I owed my friends and neighbours for their love and kindness to me.

"Ah! my dear Mother Hubbard," said Buffy, who had at this juncture come in to hear me read as far as I had gone in these memorials, "what a commotion there was about this accident! Every face expressed the greatest consternation. The populace broke up the waggon into shivers—the two waggoners had to hide in mortal fear for their lives—prayers were put up in the churches—the roads were worn out with the track of carriages full of anxious inquirers—and that person, that lady, who was passing by at the time, and who brought you home, and to whose judicious management, it was said, you owed your life, she suddenly disappeared, when Lady Hythe and the others flocked round to nurse you—a fair, portly woman, not quite, not altogether, a lady either."

"Did you not know that she was the Lucy Kent of former days, the Duchess of Ardmore now? I did not recognise her until she was leaving me. When I first became conscious, I perceived this kind, anxious face bending over me; and had a perception that I had seen it before. Still more did I feel sure that such ready wit, such judicious orders, emanated from some friend; but it was only as she left me that I discovered who she was. She had taken my hand and kissed it. I drew her towards me as well as my strength permitted, and said,

"Let me kiss your kind face, for I feel as if I owe my life to your skill."

"She whispered,

"No, madam, you must not kiss the cheek of Lucy Kent."

"But I will," I said, "and I shall feel I have kissed a good woman."

"So we kissed and parted. And the next time I saw her, Buffy, was when her son came of age, and at her own house."

"Yes, I think that business rather well managed. Her son was spirited enough to give no entertainment on that occasion unless his mother acted as Mistress of the Ceremonies. (Old 'Moppet' had been dead some time—no loss to anybody; but his absence a great relief.) The young Duke came and consulted that mother-worshipper, your son. He knew Peter would be on his side. So then Peter went round and talked the matter over with all the gentlemen, who in turn consulted all their wives; and they all came in a body to you—Lady Harpendale, that strong-minded Mrs. Plumetts

of former days, at their head. And it was decided that there should be a general leaving of cards at Ardmore, on the Duchess, by way of intimation that 'bygones were bygones.'

"Nay, Buffy, that her own worthy conduct had compelled us to forget the past."

"Pooh! pooh! Mother Hubbard, you might have thought so, having no daughters to marry; but my Lady Harpendale let out her reasons in the most palpable manner. Said she to me, 'It is better to put up with the mother, Sir Brough, than to let the Duke marry beneath him. I hear he is an inestimable young man'—she thought me rather 'inestimable' too, though not of course so super-excellent as his young Grace. And did you notice, mother, she was more civil, indeed she was absolutely fawning to the whilom Lucy Kent?"

"Yes, but she did not succeed in mating one of her daughters with her son."

"What a sad world this is, Mother Hubbard!"

"Why do you think it so much sadder to-day than yesterday, Buffy?"

"Was I in good spirits yesterday, mother?"

"Yes, Buffy, you said you had never felt more jolly in your life!"

"Then I am going to have a fit of the gout. That is one of the most certain signs of an incipient attack, to feel extremely jolly and well beforehand. Go on with these reminiscences, Mother Hubbard, while I step upstairs and take my usual dose; after which I must walk for half an hour."

Go on! How was I to go on? What was there to tell me now, but to record, one after another, the deaths of those who have been so often mentioned in these pages? A mournful obituary—a speaking graveyard—for the eventful periods of my life were over. I did not live again at Mallerdean after my accident, for my injuries were very severe—amongst other things, my hip-bone was dislocated, and I was long kept a prisoner on my couch. It was during this period that my son decided to alter, or rather to rebuild, the greater part of Mallerdean House. Its long rooms, narrow passages, numerous vestibules and halls, had been at all times cold and inconvenient. The taste for building was just coming in. I think my son was glad to remove from my sight that fatal tower. Yet it was not taken down. The site of the house was removed a few hundred yards, so as to command a long and sweeping view of the fine park scenery stretching far away into beautiful vistas.

The front of the new house was due south. The style was the old Norman; by that I knew my son did not mean to do away with the old tower—the monument of the family antiquity—the grave-stone of his father. But it was left standing apart; it formed the connecting-

link between the house and the stables. Thus I never had occasion to go again beneath its portal.

"Have you writ no more than that, Mother Hubbard? I have been absent a good half hour," said Buffy, on his return.

"What more have I to say? My history is melancholy enough, and the rest can only be a list of deaths."

"Why, you haven't married Peter yet. You can say a lot upon the disappointment he gave you; how, after being a model son, and regarding the word devotion as the sole word in the dictionary to express what he felt about his mother, he suddenly upset all your plans, and absolutely never married little Marblette."

"That, Buffy, was easily forgiven, since he married her sister Dulce."

"Then there is the marriage of my brothers Bob and Billy. Of the former, the less said about it the better; and I don't care, either, to mention the other. Mrs. Billy reminds me sometimes of what her mother was, as Mrs. Plumetts—she is strong-minded. You have said nothing at all about how Peter became my Lord of Mallerdean."

"That was a matter of course. In the history of his country will be found the history of the Lord of Mallerdean. The spread of Liberalism, as it is now called, was prodigious, when men discovered that 'progress' and not 'annihilation' was their object. I have always wondered why it was considered dangerous to the Crown, to the Church, and the State, to advocate Whig principles?"

"There are a set of people in the world who love to 'let well alone.' In these days that is impossible; but really we are now going so fast, that upon my word, Mother Hubbard, my head is in such a state of confusion with the rapidity with which events revolve about me, that I am not sure what I am—whether a Whig, a Tory, a Radical, a Liberal, or a Protectionist. I am inclined to think I am every one of them."

"Well, Buffy, you and I have about done with politics. We took our first taste of canvassing together—we shall never take another."

"Bless my heart!—I laugh to this day when I remember that affair. I wouldn't mind having it all over again."

"No, no, Buffy; Heaven forbid that I should live my life over again! It is almost done now; and I am grateful for the peace and happiness of the last fifty years. I was thirty-nine years old when I was so nearly drowned in the canal, and was taken to Dulce Domum; and here I have lived ever since, and I am now eighty-eight years of age."

"And very strong and hearty, too—you know we have promised each other to see out a hundred."

"Not for the world, dear Buffy! to me it would be most painful to become that saddest of all sights—a dotard, half-blind, wholly deaf, helpless, more feeble in mind than in body."



"In truth, Mother Hubbard, the vanity, that ought to have been yours when young has assailed you in old age. You can't bear to be anything but our darling, our pride, our queen still."

"I have resigned that office long ago."

"But no one accepted the resignation. You are still 'Queen of the County,' because no one reigns in your stead."

"That is because society is so very different now from what it was in my day."

"Yes, when I think of that time, then I am a Tory."

"As I said once before, Buffy, we are not bound down by useless ceremonies and obsolete fashions."

"The relief makes me acknowledge myself a radical."

"At the same time, Buffy, we did things grandly in those days—such state! such dignity!"

"Yes; the remembrance makes me swear myself a Conservative."

"You seem to me ready to swear anything this morning."

"It is the effect of the coming fit of gout. Here is my Lord! Has he not been down here already to-day?"

"Yes; he came at his usual hour, and brought me my flowers to adorn my breakfast-table."

"He never omits that. Here is the second Peter, too, and lo!—the third! Something is impending; they have all solemnly seated themselves on the terrace wall. By-the-bye, Mother Hubbard, that is a thing you have forgotten—the failure of the curse."

"Your mother was right—it has departed."

"No need to tell me, when I see three grown-up Peters before me! There is my Lord of Mallerdean—you were twenty years old just after he was born, therefore, my Lord of Mallerdean, you are now (hide it though you may), sixty-eight years old—you wear your years well, my good boy; and you—Peter the second—looking up so affectionately, so proudly, into your father's face—notwithstanding his apparent determination to keep you out of your lawful rights this twenty years to come, you must certainly be forty-five; and there is that handsome young Peter, about whom all the feminine world is raving, he is twenty-one—we have just celebrated his coming of age. I believe, upon my word, Mother Hubbard, an idea has struck me, as I look down upon your three Peters—they seem to me to be hatching some scheme which will lead to presenting you with a fourth Peter. Yes! my Lord wears his benignant aspect—Peter the second is glowing with delight—and young Peter seems ready to throw himself into both their arms. Here they come! Now, Mother Hubbard—prepare—you are going to be asked for your blessing. Give it, as becomes an old great-grandam—give it with a royal air, it is your last act as Queen of the County."

# POSTSCRIPT.

WRITTEN BY SIR BROUGH LANTON.



ELL! she had her wish—but she has left me here alone—my work is over. There is her empty chair—she is laid by the Peter she mourned so truly for sixty-seven years—and Dulce Domum knows her no more.

What a funeral we had! It was not the concourse of rich and great that gathered to pay her this last respect that moved us all so much, but the poor, the maimed, the halt, and the blind. Each had their meed of praise.

“She looked on me,” said one, “and I felt better.”

“She spoke to me,” said another, “and I was happy.”

Her voice had always been like music—and after Uncle Peter’s death, it had a tone in it of such low soft sweetness, it penetrated to the heart.

I wanted to lie down in the grave beside her—but I was bound to support Cousin Peter. I daresay folks thought us two old fools. Oh! my Mother Hubbard—are you really gone from us? And going, too, without preparing us!

It is now ten days, only ten days ago, since she was seated there before me—in her usual health. She had been up to Mallerdean the day before, to spend her ninetieth birthday. Gathered together to welcome her was one son, eight grandchildren, and innumerable flocks of great-grandchildren. She was, as usual, the cynosure of all eyes—the blessing of all hearts. When her health was drunk, my Lord, pointing to her descendants, seventy-two in number, promised her the dignity of great-great-grandmother before a few months were over. She shook her head—but she laid her dear old hands softly, caressingly, on the fair head of the expectant mother (she was pretty Lady Lucy More, and is grand-daughter to her that was Lucy Kent).

She shook her head—I was angry with her for it. I whispered—“Mother Hubbard, don’t be aggravating—your eyes are still bright—your hearing is good—your figure is as slim and upright as ever—you are not old at all! Looking at you by Lady Harpendale (Mrs. Plumetts as was), you’re a frisky young creature!”

She smiled—dear thing, she always smiled at me—and said, “Dear Buffy, I am fond of warnings—I have had mine; God will crown my long life with this last mercy, and take me to my rest—with my senses perfect.”

Why did I not ask her more?

Lord Mallerdean took her home, as he always did himself in her chair, long ago lined with blue satin—and he was at the cottage next morning a little before his usual hour (though that was always before

his breakfast), to entreat her not to rise too early after the fatigues of the day before.

But she was already in the drawing-room, and spreading out on the table all her birthday gifts.

"It is no fatigue to be so beloved, my son," she answered.

That was a peculiarity in her. She never called him Peter, or, indeed, any of them, though she often said the word Peter, but it was always in reference to him who was gone. And she had yet another habit. She never touched or used an umbrella. There was no crotchet or whim in this, for she never mentioned the subject; but the sight of one, or the contact, seemed to paralyse her—she had the appearance of being suddenly mesmerised by an unseen influence—and the awakening from it was distressing to witness. Thus we, who loved her, carefully guarded her from the shock. Neither time nor habit lessened the effect, and to the day of her death she never alluded to the feeling.

Cousin Peter seemed pleased that morning to see her so well, yet he had an anxious look.

"Well, my son," she said, smiling, as he gazed in her face.

"Mother, you have a far-away look in your eyes that makes me anxious, and your fair old cheek is almost transparent."

"It is time, my dear, that I should be gone. Not one of my contemporaries is alive now—not even my little child-sister Lotty."

"You must not leave me, mother!" said cousin Peter.

And his voice was like her little child Peter's, and not that of the famous Lord of Mallerdean, who was feared and honoured and renowned in every known country.

"I think it will not be long, my son. I have been dreaming of my dear Marblette, now dead these ten years. I knew when Hythe died she could not outlive him. Well, I have been dreaming much of her. She appears to me in the dress and form of our girlish days, and she is always smiling, and beckoning me. I am pleased to think that perhaps I may be young there too, such as I was when Peter first saw me."

"Mother, I know not how to live without you!"

"You know, my dear, that it is your love that has kept me here so long. Repeat to me the words of that song your grand-daughter Marblette sung to me yesterday."

"Home they brought her warrior dead!  
She nor swooned nor uttered cry;  
All her maidens, watching, said:  
'She must weep, or she will die,'"

"Then they praised him soft and low,  
Called him worthy to be loved,  
Truest friend, and noblest foe;  
Yet she neither spoke nor moved."

“ Stole a maiden from her place,  
Lightly to the warrior stept,  
Took the face-cloth from his face;  
Yet she neither moved nor wept.

“ Rose a nurse of ninety years,  
Set his child upon her knee.  
Like summer tempests came her tears;  
‘Sweet, my child, I’ll live for thee!’”

“ Thanks, my son. You know I have lived for thee, let me now go.”  
But he made her no reply. Three times that day came cousin Peter to the Cottage. I was like to make merry at his anxiety.

When he came down the following morning, having been with her the last thing at night, he had no mother. She went away in the night. Her maid said she still slept, but we ran into her room. She slept!—aye! for ever. Ah! mother, was your spirit too far gone to hear our cries? Were you so happy, as the soft smile on your lips told us, that you could not return even for one moment, just to give us your blessing! Had you been gone long? You did not die as mortals die, but you were translated. God sent his angels down, and they bore your spirit away in your sleep. You had suffered enough. The Almighty was satisfied. In the full possession of every faculty, with your mind clear and serene as ever, with but few symptoms of the great age to which you had attained about you. There was not a blemish on your person, your mind, your heart, as there never had been all your life-long. You went to God as perfect as you came from Him, after serving Him for ninety years.

So pure was your blood, illness had no power over your frame, accidents left no scars, and time seemed unable to wither you. And if this was the case with your body, how about the mind that governed this perfect body?—the heart that throbbed in it? The mind working ever for the good of those around you. The heart healing and soothing the weak and weary. Who can remember in all these ninety years that you uttered a word we had wished unsaid? Who is there in all the crowds who were so fortunate as to see you who does not think of you with delight? You made your enemies love you—your voice persuaded the bad to become good—your words fell like balm. Your memory is blessed!

THE END.



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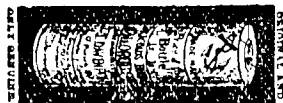
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